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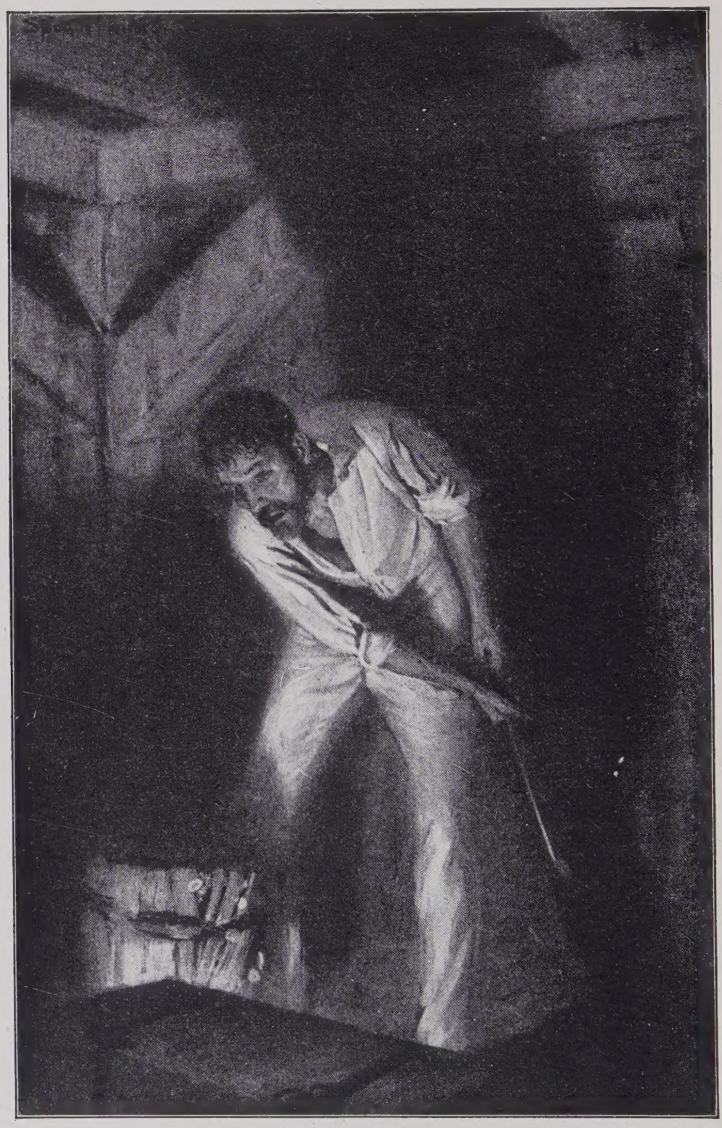
RAINBOW'S END



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O'REILLY STOOD BLINKING AT THE SIGHT EXPOSED, FOR THE LITTLE BARREL WAS FULL OF COINS—YELLOW COINS, LARGE AND SMALL

RAINBOW'S END

By REX BEACH

Author of "THE AUCTION BLOCK"
"THE SPOILERS" "THE IRON TRAIL" Etc.

Illustrated

Harper & Brothers Publishers
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Books by
REX BEACH

TOO FAT TO FIGHT
THE WINDS OF CHANCE
LAUGHING BILL HYDE
RAINBOW'S END
THE CRIMSON GARDENIA AND OTHER TALES OF ADVENTURE
HEART OF THE SUNSET
THE AUCTION BLOCK
THE IRON TRAIL
THE NET
THE NE'ER-DO-WELL
THE SPOILERS
THE BARRIER
THE SILVER HORDE
GOING SOME

HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK
[Established 1817]

Rainbow's End

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RAINBOW'S END

I

THE VALLEY OF DELIGHT

IN all probability your first view of the valley of the Yumuri will be from the Hermitage of Montserrate, for it is there that the *cocheros* drive you. Up the winding road they take you, with the bay at your back and the gorge at your right, to the crest of a narrow ridge where the chapel stands. Once there, you overlook the fairest sight in all Christendom—"the loveliest valley in the world," as Humboldt called it—for the Yumuri nestles right at your feet, a vale of pure delight, a glimpse of Paradise that bewilders the eye and fills the soul with ecstasy.

It is larger than it seems at first sight; through it meanders the river, coiling and uncoiling, hidden here and there by jungle growths, and seeking final outlet through a cleft in the wall not unlike a crack in the side of a painted bowl. The place seems to have been fashioned as a dwelling for dryads and hamadryads, for nixies and pixies, and all the fabled spirits of forest and stream. Fairy hands tinted its steep slopes and carpeted its level floor with the richest of green brocades. Nowhere is there a clash of color; nowhere does a naked hillside or monstrous jut of rock obtrude to mar its placid beauty;

nowhere can you see a crude, disfiguring mark of man's handiwork—there are only fields, and bowers, with an occasional thatched roof faded gray by the sun.

Royal palms, most perfect of trees, are scattered everywhere. They stand alone or in stately groves, their lush fronds drooping like gigantic ostrich plumes, their slim trunks as smooth and regular and white as if turned in a giant lathe and then rubbed with pipe-clay. In all Cuba, island of bewitching vistas, there is no other Yumuri, and in all the wide world, perhaps, there is no valley of moods and aspects so varying. You should see it at evening, all warm and slumberous, all gold and green and purple; or at early dawn, when the mists are fading like pale memories of dreams and the tints are delicate; or again, during a tempest, when it is a caldron of whirling vapors and when the palm-trees bend like coryphees, tossing their arms to the galloping hurricane. But whatever the time of day or the season of the year at which you visit it, the Yumuri will render you wordless with delight, and you will vow that it is the happiest valley men's eyes have ever looked upon.

Standing there beside the shrine of Our Lady of Montserrate, you will see beyond the cleft through which the river emerges another hill, La Cumbre, from which the view is almost as wonderful, and your driver may tell you about the splendid homes that used to grace its slopes in the golden days when Cuba had an aristocracy. They were classic Roman villas, such as once lined the Via Appia — little palaces, with mosaics and marbles and precious woods imported from Europe, and furnished with the rarest treasures—for in those days the Cuban planters were rich and spent their money lavishly. Melancholy reminders of this splendor exist even now in the shape of a crumbled ruin here and there, a lichened pillar, an occasional porcelain urn in its place atop a vine-grown bit of wall. Your *cochero* may point out a certain

grove of orange-trees, now little more than a rank tangle, and tell you about the *quinta* of Don Estéban Varona, and its hidden treasure; about little Estéban and Rosa, the twins; and about Sebastian, the giant slave, who died in fury, taking with him the secret of the well.

The Spanish Main is rich in tales of treasure-trove, for when the Antilles were most affluent they were least secure, and men were put to strange shifts to protect their fortunes. Certain hoards, like jewels of tragic history, in time assumed a sort of evil personality, not infrequently exercising a dire influence over the lives of those who chanced to fall under their spells. It was as if the money were accursed, for certainly the seekers often came to evil. Of such a character was the Varona treasure. Don Estéban himself was neither better nor worse than other men of his time, and although part of the money he hid was wrung from the toil of slaves and the traffic in their bodies, much of it was clean enough, and in time the earth purified it all. Since his acts made so deep an impress, and since the treasure he left played so big a part in the destinies of those who came after him, it is well that some account of these matters should be given.

The story, please remember, is an old one; it has been often told, and in the telling and retelling it is but natural that a certain glamour, a certain tropical extravagance, should attach to it, therefore you should make allowance for some exaggeration, some accretions due to the lapse of time. In the main, however, it is well authenticated and runs parallel to fact.

Doña Rosa Varona lived barely long enough to learn that she had given birth to twins. Don Estéban, whom people knew as a grim man, took the blow of his sudden bereavement as became one of his strong fiber. Leaving the priest upon his knees and the doctor busied with the babies, he strode through the house and out into the sunset, fol-

lowed by the wails of the slave women. From the negro quarters came the sound of other and even louder lamentations, for Doña Rosa had been well loved and the news of her passing had spread quickly.

Don Estéban was at heart a selfish man, and now, therefore, he felt a sullen, fierce resentment mingled with his grief. What trick was this? he asked himself. What had he done to merit such misfortune? Had he not made rich gifts to the Church? Had he not gone on foot to the shrine of Our Lady of Montserrate with a splendid votive offering—a pair of eardrops, a necklace, and a crucifix, all of diamonds that quivered in the sunlight like drops of purest water? Had he not knelt and prayed for his wife's safe delivery and then hung his gifts upon the sacred image, as Loyola had hung up his weapons before that other counterpart of Our Lady? Don Estéban scowled at the memory, for those gems were of the finest, and certainly of a value sufficient to recompense the Virgin for any ordinary miracle. They were worth five thousand pesos at least, he told himself; they represented the price of five slaves—five of his finest girls, schooled in housekeeping and of an age suitable for breeding. An extravagance, truly! Don Estéban knew the value of money as well as anybody, and he swore now that he would give no more to the Church.

He looked up from his unhappy musings to find a gigantic, barefooted negro standing before him. The slave was middle-aged; his kinky hair was growing gray; but he was of superb proportions, and the muscles which showed through the rents in his cotton garments were as smooth and supple as those of a stripling. His black face was puckered with grief, as he began:

"Master, is it true that Doña Rosa—" The fellow choked.

"Yes," Estéban nodded, wearily, "she is dead, Sebastian."

Tears came to Sebastian's eyes and overflowed his cheeks; he stood motionless, striving to voice his sympathy. At length he said:

"She was too good for this world. God was jealous and took her to Paradise."

The widowed man cried out, angrily:

"Paradise! What is this but paradise?" He stared with resentful eyes at the beauty round about him. "See! The Yumuri!" Don Estéban flung a long arm outward. "Do you think there is a sight like that in heaven? And yonder—" He turned to the harbor far below, with its fleet of sailing-ships resting like a flock of gulls upon a sea of quicksilver. Beyond the bay, twenty miles distant, a range of hazy mountains hid the horizon. Facing to the south, Estéban looked up the full length of the valley of the San Juan, clear to the majestic Pan de Matanzas, a wonderful sight indeed; then his eyes returned, as they always did, to the Yumuri, Valley of Delight. "Paradise indeed!" he muttered. "I gave her everything. She gained nothing by dying."

With a grave thoughtfulness which proved him superior to the ordinary slave, Sebastian replied:

"True! She had all that any woman's heart could desire, but in return for your goodness she gave you children. You have lost her, but you have gained an heir, and a beautiful girl baby who will grow to be another Doña Rosa. I grieved as you grieve, once upon a time, for my woman died in childbirth, too. You remember? But my daughter lives, and she has brought sunshine into my old age. That is the purpose of children." He paused and shifted his weight uncertainly, digging his stiff black toes into the dirt. After a time he said, slowly: "Excellency! Now, about the—well—?"

"Yes. What about it?" Estéban lifted smoldering eyes.

"Did the Doña Rosa confide her share of the secret to any one? Those priests and those doctors, you know—?"

"She died without speaking."

"Then it rests between you and me?"

"It does, unless you have babbled."

"Master!" Sebastian drew himself up and there was real dignity in his black face.

"Understand, my whole fortune is there—everything, even to the deeds of patent for the plantations. If I thought there was danger of your betraying me I would have your tongue pulled out and your eyes torn from their sockets."

The black man spoke with a simplicity that carried conviction. "You have seen me tested. You know I am faithful. But, master, this secret is a great burden for my old shoulders, and I have been thinking— Times are unsettled, Don Estéban, and death comes without warning. You are known to be the richest man in this province and these government officials are robbers. Suppose—I should be left alone? What then?"

The planter considered for a moment. "They are my countrymen, but a curse on them," he said, finally. "Well, when my children are old enough to hold their tongues they will have to be told. If I'm gone, you shall be the one to tell them. Now leave me; this is no time to speak of such things."

Sebastian went as noiselessly as he had come. On his way back to his quarters he took the path to the well—the place where most of his time was ordinarily spent. Sebastian had dug this well, and with his own hands he had beautified its surroundings until they were the loveliest on the Varona grounds. The rock for the building of the *quinta* had been quarried here, and in the center of the resulting depression, grass-grown and flowering now, was the well itself. Its waters seeped from subterranean caverns and filtered, pure and cool, through the porous country rock. Plantain, palm, orange, and tamarind trees bordered the hollow; over the rocky walls ran a riot of

vines and ferns and ornamental plants. It was Sebastian's task to keep this place green, and thither he took his way, from force of habit.

Through the twilight came Pancho Cueto, the manager, a youngish man, with a narrow face and bold, close-set eyes. Spying Sebastian, he began:

"So Don Estéban has an heir at last?"

The slave rubbed his eyes with the heel of his huge yellow palm and answered, respectfully:

"Yes, Don Pancho. Two little angels, a boy and a girl." His gray brows drew together in a painful frown. "Doña Rosa was a saint. No doubt there is great rejoicing in heaven at her coming. Eh? What do you think?"

"Um-m! Possibly. Don Estéban will miss her for a time and then, I dare say, he will remarry." At the negro's exclamation Cueto cried: "So! And why not? Everybody knows how rich he is. From Oriente to Pinar del Rio the women have heard about his treasure."

"What treasure?" asked Sebastian, after an instant's pause.

Cueto's dark eyes gleamed resentfully at this show of ignorance, but he laughed.

"Ho! There's a careful fellow for you! No wonder he trusts you. But do you think I have neither eyes nor ears? My good Sebastian, you know all about that treasure; in fact, you know far more about many things than Don Estéban would care to have you tell. Come now, don't you?"

Sebastian's face was like a mask carved from ebony. "Of what does this treasure consist?" he inquired. "I have never heard about it."

"Of gold, of jewels, of silver bars and precious ornaments." Cueto's head was thrust forward, his nostrils were dilated, his teeth gleamed. "Oh, it is somewhere about, as you very well know! Bah! Don't deny it. I'm no fool. What becomes of the money from the slave

girls, eh? And the sugar crops, too? Does it go to buy arms and ammunition for the rebels? No. Don Estéban hides it, and you help him. Come," he cried, disregarding Sebastian's murmurs of protest, "did you ever think how fabulous that fortune must be by this time? Did you ever think that one little gem, one bag of gold, would buy your freedom?"

"Don Estéban has promised to buy my freedom and the freedom of my girl."

"So?" The manager was plainly surprised. "I didn't know that." After a moment he began to laugh. "And yet you pretend to know nothing about that treasure? Ha! You're a good boy, Sebastian, and so I am. I admire you. We're both loyal to our master, eh? But now about Evangelina." Cueto's face took on a craftier expression. "She is a likely girl, and when she grows up she will be worth more than you, her father. Don't forget that Don Estéban is before all else a business man. Be careful that some one doesn't make him so good an offer for your girl that he will forget his promise and—sell her."

Sebastian uttered a hoarse, animal cry and the whites of his eyes showed through the gloom. "He would never sell Evangelina!"

Cueto laughed aloud once more. "Of course! He would not dare, eh? I am only teasing you. But see! You have given yourself away. Everything you tell me proves that you know all about that treasure."

"I know but one thing," the slave declared, stiffening himself slowly, "and that is to be faithful to Don Estéban." He turned and departed, leaving Pancho Cueto staring after him meditatively.

In the days following the birth of his children and the death of his wife, Don Estéban Varona, as had been his custom, steered a middle course in politics, in that way managing to avoid a clash with the Spanish officials who

ruled the island, or an open break with his Cuban neighbors, who rebelled beneath their wrongs. This was no easy thing to do, for the agents of the crown were uniformly corrupt and quite ruthless, while most of the native-born were either openly or secretly in sympathy with the revolution in the Orient. But Estéban dealt diplomatically with both factions and went on raising slaves and sugar to his own great profit. Owing to the impossibility of importing negroes, the market steadily improved, and Estéban reaped a handsome profit from those he had on hand, especially when his crop of young girls matured. His sugar-plantations prospered, too, and Pancho Cueto, who managed them, continued to wonder where the money went.

The twins, Estéban and Rosa, developed into healthy children and became the pride of Sebastian and his daughter, into whose care they had been given. As for Evangelina, the young negress, she grew tall and strong and handsome, until she was the finest slave girl in the neighborhood. Whenever Sebastian looked at her he thanked God for his happy circumstances.

Then, one day, Don Estéban Varona remarried, and the Doña Isabel, who had been a famous Habana beauty, came to live at the *quinta*. The daughter of impoverished parents, she had heard and thought much about the mysterious treasure of La Cumbre.

There followed a period of feasting and entertainment, of music and merrymaking. Spanish officials, prominent civilians of Matanzas and the countryside, drove up the hill to welcome Don Estéban's bride. But before the first fervor of his honeymoon cooled the groom began to fear that he had made a serious mistake. Doña Isabel, he discovered, was both vain and selfish. Not only did she crave luxury and display, but with singular persistence she demanded to know all about her husband's financial affairs.

Now Don Estéban was no longer young; age had

soured him with suspicion, and when once he saw himself as the victim of a mercenary marriage he turned bitterly against his wife. Her curiosity he sullenly resented, and he unblushingly denied his possession of any considerable wealth. In fact, he tried with malicious ingenuity to make her believe him a poor man. But Isabel was not of the sort to be readily deceived. Finding her arts and coquetries of no avail, she flew into a rage, and a furious quarrel ensued—the first of many. For the lady could not rest without knowing all there was to know about the treasure. Avaricious to her finger-tips, she itched to weigh those bags of precious metal and yearned to see those jewels burning upon her bosom. Her mercenary mind magnified their value many times, and her anger at Don Estéban's obstinacy deepened to a smoldering hatred.

She searched the *quinta*, of course, whenever she had a chance, but she discovered nothing—with the result that the mystery began to engross her whole thought. She pried into the obscurest corners, she questioned the slaves, she lay awake at night listening to Estéban's breathing, in the hope of surprising his secret from his dreams. Naturally such a life was trying to the husband, but as his wife's obsession grew his determination to foil her only strengthened. Outwardly, of course, the pair maintained a show of harmony, for they were proud and they occupied a position of some consequence in the community. But their private relations went from bad to worse. At length a time came when they lived in frank enmity; when Isabel never spoke to Estéban except in reproach or anger, and when Estéban unlocked his lips only to taunt his wife with the fact that she had been thwarted despite her cunning.

In most quarters, as time went on, the story of the Varona treasure was forgotten, or at least put down as legendary. Only Isabel, who, in spite of her husband's secretiveness, learned much, and Pancho Cueto, who

kept his own account of the annual income from the business, held the matter in serious remembrance. The overseer was a patient man; he watched with interest the growing discord at the *quinta* and planned to profit by it, should occasion offer.

It was only natural under such conditions that Doña Isabel should learn to dislike her stepchildren—Estéban had told her frankly that they would inherit whatever fortune he possessed. The thought that, after all, she might never share in the treasure for which she had sacrificed her youth and beauty was like to drive the woman mad, and, as may be imagined, she found ways to vent her spite upon the twins. She widened her hatred so as to include old Sebastian and his daughter, and even went so far as to persecute Evangelina's sweetheart, a slave named Asensio.

It had not taken Doña Isabel long to guess the reason for Sebastian's many privileges, and one of her first efforts had been to win the old man's confidence. It was in vain, however, that she flattered and cajoled, or stormed and threatened; Sebastian withstood her as a towering ceiba withstands the summer heat and the winter hurricane.

His firmness made her vindictive, and so in time she laid a scheme to estrange him from his master.

Doña Isabel was crafty. She began to complain about Evangelina, but it was only after many months that she ventured to suggest to her husband that he sell the girl. Estéban, of course, refused point-blank; he was too fond of Sebastian's daughter, he declared, to think of such a thing.

"So, that is it," sneered Doña Isabel. "Well, she is young and shapely and handsome, as wenches go. I rather suspected you were fond of her—"

With difficulty Estéban restrained an oath. "You mistake my meaning," he said, stiffly. "Sebastian has served me faithfully, and Evangelina plays with my

children. She is good to them; she is more of a mother to them than you have ever been."

"Is that why you dress her like a lady? Bah! A likely story!" Isabel tossed her fine, dark head. "I'm not blind; I see what goes on about me. This will make a pretty scandal among your friends—she as black as the pit, and you—"

"*Woman!*" shouted the planter, "you have a sting like a scorpion."

"I won't have that wench in my house," Isabel flared out at him.

Goaded to fury by his wife's senseless accusation, Estéban cried: "*Your* house? By what license do you call it yours?"

"Am I not married to you?"

"Damnation! Yes—as a leech is married to its victim. You suck my blood."

"Your blood!" The woman laughed shrilly. "You have no blood; your veins run vinegar. You are a miser."

"Miser! Miser! I grow sick of the word. It is all you find to taunt me with. · Confess that you married me for my money," he roared.

"Of course I did! Do you think a woman of my beauty would marry you for anything else? But a fine bargain I made!"

"Vampire!"

"Wife or vampire, I intend to rule this house, and I refuse to be shamed by a thick-lipped African. Her airs tell her story. She is insolent to me, but—I sha'n't endure it. She laughs at me. Well, your friends shall laugh at you."

"Silence!" commanded Estéban.

"Sell her."

"No."

"Sell her, or—"

Without waiting to hear her threat Estéban tossed his arms above his head and fled from the room. Flinging himself into the saddle, he spurred down the hill and through the town to the Casino de Español, where he spent the night at cards with the Spanish officials. But he did not sell Evangelina.

In the days that followed many similar scenes occurred, and as Estéban's home life grew more unhappy his dissipations increased. He drank and gambled heavily; he brought his friends to the *quinta* with him, and strove to forget domestic unpleasantness in boisterous revelry.

His wife, however, found opportunities enough to weary and exasperate him with reproaches regarding the slave girl.

II

SPANISH GOLD

THE twins were seven years old when Doña Isabel's schemes bore their first bitter fruit, and the occasion was a particularly uproarious night when Don Estéban entertained a crowd of his Castilian friends. Little Rosa was awakened at a late hour by the laughter and shouts of her father's guests. She was afraid, for there was something strange about the voices, some quality to them which was foreign to the child's experience. Creeping into her brother's room, she awoke him, and together they listened.

Don Mario de Castaño was singing a song, the words of which were lost, but which brought a yell of approval from his companions. The twins distinguished the voice of Don Pablo Peza, too—Don Pablo, whose magnificent black beard had so often excited their admiration. Yes, and there was Col. Mendoza y Linares, doubtless in his splendid uniform. These gentlemen were well and favorably known to the boy and girl, yet Rosa began to whimper, and when Estéban tried to reassure her his own voice was thin and reedy from fright.

In the midst of their agitation they heard some one weeping; there came a rush of feet down the hallway, and the next instant Evangelina flung herself into the room. A summer moon flooded the chamber with radiance and enabled her to see the two small white figures sitting up in the middle of the bed.

Evangelina fell upon her knees before them. "Little

master! Little mistress!" she sobbed. "You will save me, won't you? We love each other, eh? See then, what a crime this is! Say that you will save me!" She was beside herself, and her voice was hoarse and cracked from grief. She wrung her hands, she rocked herself from side to side, she kissed the twins' nightgowns, tugging at them convulsively.

The children were frightened, but they managed to quaver: "What has happened? Who has harmed you?"

"Don Pablo Peza," wept the negress. "Your father has sold me to him—lost me at cards. Oh, I shall die! Sebastian won't believe it. He is praying. And Asensio— O God! But what can they do to help me? You alone can save me. You won't let Don Pablo take me away? It would kill me."

"Wait!" Estéban scrambled out of bed and stood beside his dusky nurse and playmate. "Don't cry any more. I'll tell papa that you don't like Don Pablo."

Rosa followed. "Yes, come along, brother," she cried, shrilly. "We'll tell Don Pablo to go home and leave our Evangelina."

"My blessed doves! But will they listen to you?" moaned the slave.

"Papa does whatever we ask," they assured her, gravely. "If he should growl we'll come back and hide you in the big wardrobe where nobody will ever find you." Then hand in hand, with their long nightgowns lifted to their knees, they pattered out into the hall and down toward the living-room, whence came the shouting and the laughter.

Don Mario de Castaño, who was facing the door, stopped in the midst of a ribald song to cry: "God be praised! What's this I see?"

The others looked and then burst into merriment, for across the litter of cards and dice and empty glasses they saw a dimpled girl and boy, as like as two peas. They

were just out of bed; they were peering through the smoke, and blinking like two little owls. Their evident embarrassment amused the guests hugely.

"So! You awaken the household with your songs," some one chided Don Mario.

"Two cherubs from heaven," another exclaimed.

And a third cried, "A toast to Estéban's beautiful children."

But the father lurched forward, a frown upon his face. "What is this, my dears?" he inquired, thickly. "Run back to your beds. This is no place for you."

"We love Evangelina," piped the twins. "You must not let Don Pablo have her—if you please."

"Evangelina?"

They nodded. "We love her. . . . She plays with us every day. . . . We want her to stay here. . . . She belongs to us."

Accustomed as they were to prompt compliance with their demands, they spoke imperiously; but they had never seen a frown like this upon their father's face, and at his refusal their voices grew squeaky with excitement and uncertainty.

"Go to your rooms, my sweethearts," Don Estéban directed, finally.

"We want Evangelina. She belongs to us," they chorused, stubbornly.

Don Pablo shook with laughter. "So! She belongs to you, eh? And I'm to be robbed of my winnings. Very well, then, come and give me a kiss, both of you, and I'll see what can be done."

But the children saw that Don Pablo's face was strangely flushed, that his eyes were wild and his magnificent beard was wet with wine; therefore they hung back.

"You won your bet fairly," Estéban growled at him. "Pay no heed to these babies."

"Evangelina is ours," the little ones bravely repeated.

Then their father exploded: "The devil! Am I dreaming? Where have you learned to oppose me? Back to your beds, both of you." Seeing them hesitate, he shouted for his wife. "Ho, there! Isabel, my love! Come put these imps to rest. Or must I teach them manners with my palm? A fine thing, truly! Are they to be allowed to roam the house at will and get a fever?"

Mere mention of their stepmother's name was enough for Rosa and Estéban; they scuttled away as fast as they could go, and when Doña Isabel came to their rooms, a few moments later, she found them in their beds, with their eyes deceitfully squeezed shut. Evangelina was cowering in a corner. Isabel had overheard the wager, and her soul was evilly alight; she jerked the slave girl to her feet and with a blow of her palm sent her to her quarters. Then she turned her attention to the twins. When she left them they were weeping silently, both for themselves and for Evangelina, whom they dearly loved.

Meanwhile Don Mario had resumed his singing.

Day was breaking when Estéban Varona bade his guests good-by at the door of his house. As he stood there Sebastian came to him out of the mists of the dawn. The old man had been waiting for hours. He was half crazed from apprehension, and now cast himself prone before his master, begging for Evangelina.

Don Pablo, in whom the liquor was dying, cursed impatiently: "*Caramba!* Have I won the treasure of your whole establishment?" he inquired. "Perhaps you value this wench at more than a thousand pesos; if so, you will say that I cheated you."

"No! She's only an ordinary girl. My wife doesn't like her, and so I determined to get rid of her. She is yours, fairly enough," Varona told him.

"Then send her to my house. I'll breed her to Salvador, my cochero. He's the strongest man I have."

Sebastian uttered a strangled cry and rose to his feet. "Master! You must not—"

"Silence!" ordered Estéban. Wine never agreed with him, and this morning its effects, combined with his losses at gambling, had put him in a nasty temper. "Go about your business. What do you mean by this, anyhow?" he shouted.

But Sebastian, dazed of mind and sick of soul, went on, unheeding. "She is my girl. You promised me her freedom. I warn you—"

"Eh?" The planter swayed forward and with blazing eyes surveyed his slave. Estéban knew that he had done a foul thing in risking the girl upon the turn of a card, and an inner voice warned him that he would repent his action when he became sober, but in his present mood this very knowledge enraged him the more. "You warn me? Of what?" he growled.

At this moment neither master nor man knew exactly what he said or did. Sebastian raised his hand on high. In reality the gesture was meant to call Heaven as a witness to his years of faithful service, but, misconstruing his intent, Pablo Peza brought his riding-whip down across the old man's back, crying:

"Ho! None of that."

A shudder ran through Sebastian's frame. Whirling, he seized Don Pablo's wrist and tore the whip from his fingers. Although the Spaniard was a strong man, he uttered a cry of pain.

At this indignity to a guest Estéban flew into a fury. "Pancho!" he cried. "Ho! Pancho!" When the manager came running, Estéban explained: "This fool is dangerous. He raised his hand to me and to Don Pablo."

Sebastian's protests were drowned by the angry voices of the others.

"Tie him to yonder grating," directed Estéban, who

was still in the grip of a senseless rage. "Flog him well and make haste about it."

Sebastian, who had no time in which to recover himself, made but a weak resistance when Pancho Cueto locked his wrists into a pair of clumsy, old-fashioned manacles, first passing the chain around one of the bars of the iron window-grating which Estéban had indicated. Sebastian felt that his whole world was tumbling about his ears. He thought he must be dreaming.

Cueto swung a heavy lash; the sound of his blows echoed through the *quinta*, and they summoned, among others, Doña Isabel, who watched the scene from behind her shutter with much satisfaction. The guests looked on approvingly.

Sebastian made no outcry. The face he turned to his master, however, was puckered with reproach and bewilderment. The whip bit deep; it drew blood and raised welts the thickness of one's thumb; nevertheless, for the first few moments the victim suffered less in body than in spirit. His brain was so benumbed, so shocked with other excitations, that he was well-nigh insensible to physical pain. That Evangelina, flesh of his flesh, had been sold, that his lifelong faithfulness had brought such reward as this, that Estéban, light of his soul, had turned against him — all this was simply astounding. More his simple mind could not compass for the moment. Gradually, however, he began to resent the shrieking injustice of it all, and unsuspected forces gathered inside of him. They grew until his frame was shaken by primitive savage impulses.

After a time Don Estéban cried: "That will do, Cueto! Leave him now for the flies to punish. They will remind him of his insolence."

Then the guests departed, and Estéban staggered into the house and went to bed.

All that morning Sebastian stood with his hands chained

high over his head. The sun grew hotter and ever hotter upon his lacerated back: the blood dried and clotted there; a cloud of flies gathered, swarming over the raw gashes left by Cueto's whip.

Before leaving for Don Pablo's *quinta* Evangelina came to bid her father an agonized farewell, and for a long time after she had gone the old man stood motionless, senseless, scarcely breathing. Nor did the other slaves venture to approach him to offer sympathy or succor. They passed with heads averted and with fear in their hearts.

Since Don Estéban's nerves, or perhaps it was his conscience, did not permit him to sleep, he arose about noontime and dressed himself. He was still drunk, and the mad rage of the early morning still possessed him; therefore, when he mounted his horse he pretended not to see the figure chained to the window-grating. Sebastian's affection for his master was doglike and he had taken his punishment as a dog takes his, more in surprise than in anger, but at this proof of callous indifference a fire kindled in the old fellow's breast, hotter by far than the fever from his fly-blown scores. He was thirsty, too, but that was the least of his sufferings.

Sometime during the afternoon the negro heard himself addressed through the window against the bars of which he leaned. The speaker was Doña Isabel. She had waited patiently until she knew he must be faint from exhaustion and then she had let herself into the room behind the grating, whence she could talk to him without fear of observation.

"Do you suffer, Sebastian?" she began in a tone of gentleness and pity.

"Yes, mistress." The speaker's tongue was thick and swollen.

"La! La! What a crime! And you the most faithful slave in all Cuba!"

"Yes, mistress."

"Can I help you?"

The negro raised his head; he shook his body to rid himself of the insects which were devouring him.

"Give me a drink of water," he said, hoarsely.

"Surely, a great gourdful, all cool and dripping from the well. But first I want you to tell me something. Come now, let us have an understanding with each other."

"A drink, for the love of Christ," panted the old man, and Doña Isabel saw how cracked and dry were his thick lips, how near the torture had come to prostrating him.

"I'll do more," she promised, and her voice was like honey. "I'll tell Pancho Cueto to unlock you, even if I risk Estéban's anger by so doing. You have suffered too much, my good fellow. Indeed you have. Well, I can help you now and in the future, or—I can make your life just such a misery as it has been to-day. Will you be my friend? Will you tell me something?" She was close to the window; her black eyes were gleaming; her face was ablaze with greed.

"What can I tell you?"

"Oh, you know very well! I've asked it often enough, but you have lied, just as my husband has lied to me. He is a miser; he has no heart; he cares for nobody, as you can see. You must hate him now, even as I hate him." There was a silence during which Doña Isabel tried to read the expression on that tortured face in the sunlight. "Do you?"

"Perhaps."

"Then tell me—is there really a treasure, or—?" The woman gasped; she choked; she could scarcely force the question for fear of disappointment. "Tell me there is, Sebastian." She clutched the bars and shook them. "I've heard so many lies that I begin to doubt."

The old man nodded. "Oh yes, there is a treasure," said he.

"God! You have seen it?" Isabel was trembling as if with an ague. "What is it like? How much is there? Good Sebastian, I'll give you water; I'll have you set free if you tell me."

"How much? I don't know. But there is much—pieces of Spanish gold, silver coins in casks and in little boxes—the boxes are bound with iron and have hasps and staples; bars of precious metal and little paper packages of gems, all tied up and hidden in leather bags." Sebastian could hear his listener panting; her bloodless fingers were wrapped tightly around the bars above his head.

"Yes! Go on."

"There are ornaments, too. God knows they must have come from heaven, they are so beautiful; and pearls from the Caribbean as large as plums."

"Are you speaking the truth?"

"Every peso, every bar, every knickknack I have handled with my own hands. Did I not make the hiding-place all alone? Señora, everything is there just as I tell you—and more. The grants of title from the crown for this quinta and the sugar-plantations, they are there, too. Don Estéban used to fear the government officials, so he hid his papers securely. Without them the lands belong to no one. You understand?"

"Of course! Yes, yes! But the jewels— God! where are they hidden?"

"You would never guess!" Sebastian's voice gathered strength. "Ten thousand men in ten thousand years would never find the place, and nobody knows the secret but Don Estéban and me."

"I believe you. I knew all the time it was here. Well? Where is it?"

Sebastian hesitated and said, piteously, "I am dying—"

Isabel could scarcely contain herself. "I'll give you water, but first tell me where—where! God in heaven! Can't you see that I, too, am perishing?"

"I must have a drink."

"Tell me first."

Sebastian lifted his head and, meeting the speaker's eyes, laughed hoarsely.

At the sound of his unnatural merriment Isabel recoiled as if stung. She stared at the slave's face in amazement and then in fury. She stammered, incoherently, "You—you have been—lying!"

"Oh no! The treasure is there, the greatest treasure in all Cuba, but you shall never know where it is. I'll see to that. It was you who sold my girl; it was you who brought me to this; it was your hand that whipped me. Well, I'll tell Don Estéban how you tried to bribe his secret from me! What do you think he'll do then? Eh? You'll feel the lash on your white back—"

"You *fool!*" Doña Isabel looked murder. "I'll punish you for this; I'll make you speak if I have to rub your wounds with salt."

But Sebastian closed his eyes wearily. "You can't make me suffer more than I have suffered," he said. "And now—I curse you. May that treasure be the death of you. May you live in torture like mine the rest of your days; may your beauty turn to ugliness such that men will spit at you; may you never know peace again until you die in poverty and want—"

But Doña Isabel, being superstitious, fled with her fingers in her ears; nor did she undertake to make good her barbarous threat, realizing opportunely that it would only serve to betray her desperate intentions and put her husband further on his guard. Instead she shut herself into her room, where she paced the floor, racking her brain to guess where the hiding-place could be or to devise some means of silencing Sebastian's tongue. To feel that she had been overmatched, to know that there was indeed a treasure, to think that the two who knew where it was had been laughing at her all this time, filled the

woman with an agony approaching that which Sebastian suffered from his flies.

As the sun was sinking beyond the farther rim of the Yumuri and the valley was beginning to fill with shadows Estéban Varona rode up the hill. His temper was more evil than ever, if that were possible, for he had drunk again in an effort to drown the memory of his earlier actions. With him rode half a dozen or more of his friends, coming to dine and put in another night at his expense. There were Pablo Peza, and Mario de Castaño, once more; Col. Mendoza y Linares, old Pedro Miron, the advocate, and others of less consequence, whom Estéban had gathered from the Spanish Club. The host dismounted and lurched across the courtyard to Sebastian.

"So, my fine fellow," he began. "Have you had enough of rebellion by this time?"

"Why did you have him flogged?" the advocate inquired.

Estéban explained, briefly, "He dared to raise his hand in anger against one of my guests."

Sebastian's face was working as he turned upon his master to say: "I would be lying if I told you that I am sorry for what I did. It is you have done wrong. Your soul is black with this crime. Where is my girl?"

"The devil! To hear you talk one would think you were a free man." The planter's eyes were bleared and he brandished his riding-whip threateningly. "I do as I please with my slaves. I tolerate no insolence. Your girl? Well, she's in the house of Salvador, Don Pablo's cochero, where she belongs. I've warned him that he will have to tame her unruly spirit, as I have tamed yours."

Sebastian had hung sick and limp against the grating, but at these words he suddenly roused. It was as if a current of electricity had galvanized him. He strained at his manacles and the bars groaned under his weight. His eyes began to roll, his lips drew back over his blue

gums. Noting his expression of ferocity, Estéban cut at his naked back with the riding-whip, crying:

"Ho! Not subdued yet, eh? You need another flogging."

"Curse you and all that is yours," roared the maddened slave. "May you know the misery you have put upon me. May you rot for a million years in hell." The whip was rising and falling now, for Estéban had lost what little self-control the liquor had left to him. "May your children's bodies grow filthy with disease; may they starve; may they—"

Sebastian was yelling, though his voice was hoarse with pain. The lash drew blood with every blow. Meanwhile, he wrenched and tugged at his bonds with the fury of a maniac.

"Pablo! Your machete, quick!" panted the slave-owner. "God's blood! I'll make an end of this black fiend, once for all."

Estéban Varona's guests had looked on at the scene with the same mild interest they would display at the whipping of a balky horse: and, now that the animal threatened to become dangerous, it was in their view quite the proper thing to put it out of the way. Don Pablo Peza stepped toward his mare to draw the machete from its scabbard. But he did not hand it to his friend. He heard a shout, and turned in time to see a wonderful and a terrible thing.

Sebastian had braced his naked feet against the wall; he had bowed his back and bent his massive shoulders—a back and a pair of shoulders that looked as bony and muscular as those of an ox—and he was heaving with every ounce of strength in his enormous body. As Pablo stared he saw the heavy grating come away from its anchorage in the solid masonry, as a shrub is uprooted from soft ground. The rods bent and twisted; there was a clank and rattle and clash of metal upon the flags;

and then—Sebastian turned upon his tormentor, a free man, save only for the wide iron bracelets and their connecting chain. He was quite insane. His face was frightful to behold; it was apelike in its animal rage, and he towered above his master like some fabled creature out of the African jungle of his forefathers.

Sebastian's fists alone would have been formidable weapons, but they were armored and weighted with the old-fashioned, hand-wrought irons which Pancho Cueto had locked upon them. Wrapping the chain in his fingers, the slave leaped at Estéban and struck, once. The sound of the blow was sickening, for the whole bony structure of Estéban Varona's head gave way.

There was a horrified cry from the other white men. Don Pablo Peza ran forward, shouting. He swung his machete, but Sebastian met him before the blow could descend, and they went down together upon the hard stones. Again Sebastian smote, with his massive hands wrapped in the chain and his wrists encased in steel, and this time it was as if Don Pablo's head had been caught between a hammer and an anvil. The negro's strength, exceptional at all times, was multiplied tenfold; he had run amuck. When he arose the machete was in his grasp and Don Pablo's brains were on his knuckles.

It all happened in far less time than it takes to tell. The onlookers had not yet recovered from their first consternation; in fact they were still fumbling and tugging at whatever weapons they carried when Sebastian came toward them, brandishing the blade on high. Pedro Miron, the advocate, was the third to fall. He tried to scramble out of the negro's path, but, being an old man, his limbs were too stiff to serve him and he went down shrieking.

By now the horses had caught the scent of hot blood and were plunging furiously, the clatter of their hoofs mingling with the blasphemies of the riders, while Se-

bastian's bestial roaring made the commotion even more hideous.

Estéban's guests fought as much for their lives as for vengeance upon the slayer, for Sebastian was like a gorilla; he seemed intent upon killing them all. He vented his fury upon whatever came within his reach; he struck at men and animals alike, and the shrieks of wounded horses added to the din.

It was a frightful combat. It seemed incredible that one man could work such dreadful havoc in so short a time. Varona and two of his friends were dead; two more were badly wounded, and a Peruvian stallion lay kicking on the flagging when Col. Mendoza y Linares finally managed to get a bullet home in the black man's brain.

Those who came running to learn the cause of the hubbub turned away sick and pallid, for the paved yard was a shambles. Pancho Cueto called upon the slaves to help him, but they slunk back to their quarters, dumb with terror and dismay.

All that night people from the town below came and went and the *quinta* resounded to sobs and lamentations, but of all the relatives of the dead and wounded, Doña Isabel took her bereavement hardest. Strange to say, she could not be comforted. She wept, she screamed, she tore her hair, tasting the full nauseousness of the cup her own avarice had prepared. Now, when it was too late, she realized that she had overreached herself, having caused the death of the only two who knew the secret of the treasure. She remembered, also, Sebastian's statement that even the deeds of patent for the land were hidden with the rest, where ten thousand men in ten thousand years could never find them.

Impressed by her manifestations of grief, Estéban's friends reasoned that the widow must have loved her husband dearly. They told one another they had wronged her.

III

"THE O'REILLY"

AGE and easy living had caused Don Mario de Castaño, the sugar merchant, to take on weight. He had, in truth, become so fat that he waddled like a penguin when he walked; and when he rode, the springs of his French victoria gave up in despair. They glued themselves together, face to face, and Don Mario felt every rut and every rock in the road. Nor was the merchant any less heavy in mind than in body, for he was both very rich and very serious, and nothing is more ponderous than a rich, fat man who takes his riches and his fatness seriously.

In disposition Don Mario was practical and unromantic; he boasted that he had never had an illusion, never an interest outside of his business. And yet, on the day this story opens, this prosaic personage, in spite of his bulging waistband and his taut neckband, in spite of his short breath and his prickly heat, was in a very whirl of pleasurable excitement. Don Mario, in fact, suffered the greatest of all illusions: he was in love, and he believed himself beloved. The object of his adoration was little Rosa Varona, the daughter of his one-time friend Estéban. At thought of her the planter glowed with ardor—at any rate he took it to be ardor, although it might have been the fever from that summer rash which so afflicted him—and his heart fluttered in a way dangerous to one of his apoplectic tendencies. To be sure, he had met Rosa only twice since her return from her Yankee

school, but twice had been enough; with prompt decision he had resolved to do her the honor of making her his wife.

Now, with a person of Don Mario's importance, to decide for himself is to decide for others, and inasmuch as he knew that Doña Isabel, Rosa's stepmother, was notoriously mercenary and had not done at all well since her husband's death, it did not occur to him to doubt that his suit would prosper. It was, in fact, to make terms with her that he rode forth in the heat of this particular afternoon.

Notwithstanding the rivulets of perspiration that were coursing down every fold of his flesh, and regardless of the fact that the body of his victoria was tipped at a drunken angle, as if struggling to escape the burdens of his great weight, Don Mario felt a jauntiness of body and of spirit almost like that of youth. He saw himself as a splendid prince riding toward the humble home of some obscure maiden whom he had graciously chosen to be his mate.

His arrival threw Doña Isabel into a flutter; the woman could scarcely contain her curiosity when she came to meet him, for he was not the sort of man to inconvenience himself by mere social visits. Their first formal greetings over, Don Mario surveyed the bare living-room and remarked, lugubriously:

"I see many changes here."

"No doubt," the widow agreed. "Times have been hard since poor Estéban's death."

"What a terrible calamity that was! I shudder when I think of it," said he. "I was his guest on the night previous, you remember? In fact, I witnessed his wager of the negro girl, Evangelina—the root of the whole tragedy. Well, well! Who would have believed that old slave, her father, would have run mad at losing her? A shocking affair, truly! and one I shall never get out of my mind."

"Shocking, yes. But what do you think of a rich man, like Estéban, who would leave his family destitute? Who would die without revealing the place where he had stored his treasure?"

Doña Isabel, it was plain, felt her wrongs keenly; she spoke with as much spirit as if her husband had permitted himself to be killed purely out of spite toward her.

De Castaño shook his round bullet head, saying with some impatience: "You still believe in that treasure, eh? My dear señora, the only treasure Varona left was his adorable children—and your admirable self." Immediately the speaker regretted his words, for he remembered, too late, that Doña Isabel was reputed to be a trifle unbalanced on this subject of the Varona treasure.

"I do not believe; *I know!*" the widow answered, with more than necessary vehemence. "What became of all Estéban's money if he did not bury it? He never gave any to me, for he was a miser. You know, as well as I, that he carried on a stupendous business in slaves and sugar, and it was common knowledge that he hid every peso for fear of his enemies. But where? *Where?* That is the question."

"You, if any one, should know, after all the years you have spent in hunting for it," the merchant observed. "Dios mio! Almost before Estéban was buried you began the search. People said you were going to tear this house down."

"Well, I never found a trace. I had holes dug in the gardens, too."

"You see? No, señora, it is possible to hide anything except money. No man can conceal that where another will not find it."

Isabel's face had grown hard and avaricious, even during this brief talk; her eyes were glowing; plainly she was as far as ever from giving up her long-cherished conviction.

"I don't ask anybody to believe the story," she said,

resentfully. "All the same, it is true. There are pieces of Spanish gold and silver coins, in boxes bound with iron and fitted with hasps and staples; packages of gems; pearls from the Caribbean as large as plums. Oh! Sebastian told me all about it."

"Of course, of course! I shall not argue the matter." Don Mario dismissed the subject with a wave of his plump hand. "Now, Doña Isabel—"

"As if it were not enough to lose that treasure," the widow continued, stormily, "the Government must free all our slaves. Tse! Tse! And now that there is no longer a profit in sugar, my plantations—"

"No profit in sugar? What are you saying?" queried the caller.

"Oh, *you* have a way of prospering! What touches your fingers turns to gold. But you are not at the mercy of an administrador."

"Precisely! I am my own manager. If your crops do not pay, then Pancho Cueto is cheating you. He is capable of it. Get rid of him. But I didn't come here to talk about Estéban's hidden treasure, nor his plantations, nor Pancho Cueto. I came here to talk about your stepdaughter, Rosa."

"So?" Doña Isabel looked up quickly.

"She interests me. She is more beautiful than the stars." Don Mario rolled his eyes toward the high ceiling, which, like the sky, was tinted a vivid cerulean blue. "She personifies every virtue; she is—delectable." He pursed his wet lips, daintily picked a kiss from between them with his thumb and finger, and snapped it into the air.

Inasmuch as Isabel had always hated the girl venomously, she did not trust herself to comment upon her caller's enthusiasm.

"She is now eighteen," the fat suitor went on, ecstatically, "and so altogether charming— But why waste

time in pretty speeches? I have decided to marry her."

De Castaño plucked a heavily scented silk handkerchief from his pocket and wiped a beading of moisture from his brow and upper lip. He had a habit of perspiring when roused from his usual lethargy.

"Rosa has a will of her own," guardedly ventured the stepmother.

Don Mario broke out, testily: "Naturally; so have we all. Now let us speak plainly. You know me. I am a person of importance. I am rich enough to afford what I want, and I pay well. You understand? Well, then, you are Rosa's guardian and you can bend her to your desires."

"If that were only so!" exclaimed the woman. "She and Estéban—what children! What tempers!—Just like their father's! They have never liked me; they disobey me at every opportunity; they exercise the most diabolical ingenuity in making my life miserable. They were to be their father's heirs, you know, and they blame me for his death, for our poverty, and for all the other misfortunes that have overtaken us. We live like cats and dogs."

Don Mario had been drumming his fat fingers impatiently upon the arm of his chair. Now he exclaimed:

"Your pardon, señora, but I am just now very little interested in your domestic relations; they do not thrill me—as my own prospective happiness does. What you say about Rosa only makes me more eager, for I loathe a sleepy woman. Now tell me, is she— Has she any— affairs of the heart?"

"N-no, unless perhaps a flirtation with that young American, Juan O'Reilly." Doña Isabel gave the name its Spanish pronunciation of "O'Rail-ye."

"Juan O'Reilly? O'Reilly? Oh yes! But what has he to offer a woman? He is little more than a clerk."

"That is what I tell her. Oh, it hasn't gone far as yet."

"Good!" Don Mario rose to leave, for the exertion of his ride had made him thirsty. "You may name your own reward for helping me and I will pay it the day Rosa marries me. Now kindly advise her of my intentions and tell her I shall come to see her soon."

It was quite true that Johnnie O'Reilly—or "The O'Reilly," as his friends called him—had little in the way of worldly advantage to offer any girl, and it was precisely because of this fact that he had accepted a position here in Cuba, where, from the very nature of things, promotion was likely to be more rapid than in the New York office of his firm. He had come to this out-of-the-way place prepared to live the lonely life of an exile, if an O'Reilly could be lonely anywhere, and for a brief time he had been glum enough.

But the O'Reillys, from time immemorial, had been born and bred to exile; it was their breath, their meat and drink, and this particular member of the clan thrived upon it quite as well as had the other Johnnies and Michaels and Andys who had journeyed to far shores. The O'Reillys were audacious men, a bit too heedless of their own good, perhaps; a bit too light-hearted readily to impress a grave world with their varied abilities, but sterling men, for all that, ambitious men, men with lime in their bones and possessed of a high and ready chivalry that made friends for them wherever their wandering feet strayed. Spain, France, and the two Americas had welcomed O'Reillys of one sort or another; even Cuba had the family name written large upon her scroll. So Johnnie, of New York and Matanzas, although at first he felt himself a stranger in a strange land, was not so considered by the Cubans.

A dancing eye speaks every language; a singing heart gathers its own audience. Before the young Irish-American had more than a bowing acquaintance with the

commonest Spanish verbs he had a calling acquaintance with some of the most exclusive people of Matanzas. He puzzled them, to be sure, for they could not fathom the reason for his ever-bubbling gladness, but they strove to catch its secret, and, striving, they made friends with him. O'Reilly did not puzzle their daughters nearly so much: more than one aristocratic señorita felt sure that she quite understood the tall, blond stranger with the laughing eyes, or could understand him if he gave her half a chance, and so, as had been the case with other O'Reillys in other lands, Johnnie's exile became no exile at all. He had adjusted himself serenely to his surroundings when Rosa Varona returned from school, but with her coming, away went all his complacency. His contentment vanished; he experienced a total change in his opinions, his hopes, and his ambitions.

He discovered, for example, that Matanzas was by no means the out-of-the-way place he had considered it; on the contrary, after meeting Rosa once by accident, twice by design, and three times by mutual arrangement, it had dawned upon him that this was the chief city of Cuba, if not, perhaps, the hub around which the whole world revolved; certainly it was the most agreeable of all cities, since it contained everything that was necessary for man's happiness. Yet, despite the thrill of his awakening, O'Reilly was not at all pleased with himself, for, as it happened, there was another girl back home, and during his first year of loneliness he had written to her more freely and more frequently than any man on such a salary as his had a right to do.

O'Reilly laid no claims to literary gifts; nevertheless, it seemed to him, as he looked back upon it, that his pen must have been dipped in magic and in moonlight, for the girl had expressed an eager willingness to share his interesting economic problems, and in fact was waiting for him to give her the legal right. Inasmuch as her father was

O'Reilly's "Company" it may be seen that Rosa Varona's home-coming seriously complicated matters, not only from a sentimental, but from a business standpoint.

It was in a thoughtful mood that he rode up La Cumbre toward the *Quinta de Estéban*, late on the afternoon of Don Mario's visit. Instead of going directly to the house as the merchant had done, O'Reilly turned off from the road and, after tethering his horse in a cluster of guava bushes, proceeded on foot. He did not like Doña Isabel, nor did Doña Isabel like him. Moreover, he had a particular reason for avoiding her to-day.

Just inside the Varona premises he paused an instant to admire the outlook. The *quinta* commanded an excellent view of the Yumuri, on the one hand, and of the town and harbor on the other; no one ever climbed the hill from the city to gaze over into that hidden valley without feeling a pleasurable surprise at finding it still there. We are accustomed to think of perfect beauty as unsubstantial, evanescent; but the Yumuri never changed, and in that lay its supremest wonder.

Through what had once been well-tended grounds, O'Reilly made his way to a sort of sunken garden which, in spite of neglect, still remained the most charming nook upon the place; and there he sat down to wait for Rosa. The hollow was effectually screened from view by a growth of plantain, palm, orange, and tamarind trees; over the rocky walls ran a profusion of flowering plants and vines; in the center of the open space was an old well, its masonry curb all but crumbled away.

When Rosa at last appeared, O'Reilly felt called upon to tell her, somewhat dizzily, that she was beyond doubt the sweetest flower on all the *Quinta de Estéban*, and since this somewhat hackneyed remark was the boldest speech he had ever made to her, she blushed prettily, flashing him a dimpled smile of mingled pleasure and surprise.

"Oh, but I assure you I'm in no sweet temper," said she. "Just now I'm tremendously angry."

"Why?"

"It's that stepmother—Isabel."

"So! You've been quarreling again, eh? Well, she's the easiest woman in all Matanzas to quarrel with—perhaps the only one who doesn't see something good in me. I'm afraid to talk to her for fear she'd convince me I'm wholly abominable."

Rosa laughed, showing her fine, regular teeth—O'Reilly thought he had never seen teeth so even and white. "Yes, she is a difficult person. If she dreamed that I see you as often as I do— Well—" Rosa lifted her eloquent hands and eyes heavenward. "I suppose that's why I enjoy doing it—I so dearly love to spite her."

"I see!" O'Reilly puckered his brows and nodded. "But why, in that case, haven't you seen me oftener? We might just as well have made the good lady's life totally unbearable."

"Silly! She knows nothing about it." With a flirtatious sigh Rosa added: "That's what robs the affair of its chief pleasure. Since it does not bother her in the least, I think I will not allow you to come any more."

After judicious consideration, O'Reilly pretended to agree.

"There's no fun in wreaking a horrible revenge, when your enemy isn't wise to it," he acknowledged. "Since it's your idea to irritate your stepmother, perhaps it would annoy her more if I made love directly to her."

Rosa tittered, and then inquired, naïvely, "Can you make love, señor?"

"Can I? It's the one ability an O'Reilly inherits. Listen to this now." Reaching forth, he took Rosa's fingers in his. "Wait!" he cried as she resisted. "Pretend that you're Mrs. Varona, your own stepmother, and that this is her dimpled hand I'm holding."

"Oh-h!" The girl allowed his grasp to remain. "But Isabel's hand isn't dimpled: it's thin and bony. I've felt it on my ears often enough."

"Don't interrupt," he told her. "Isabel, my little darling—"

"'Little'! La! La! She's as tall and ugly as a chimney."

"Hush! I've held my tongue as long as I can, but now it's running away of its own accord, and I must tell you how mad I am about you. The first time I saw you—it was at the ball in the Spanish Club—" Again Rosa drew away sharply, at which O'Reilly laid his other hand over the one in his palm, saying, quickly: "You and your stepdaughter, Rosa. Do you remember that first waltz of ours? Sure, I thought I was in heaven, with you in my arms and your eyes shining into mine, and I told you so."

"So you make the same pretty speeches to all women, eh?" the girl reproached him.

"Isabel, sweetheart, I lose my breath when I think of you; my lips pucker up for kisses—"

"'*Isabel'!*" exclaimed a voice, and the lovers started guiltily apart. They turned to find Estéban, Rosa's twin brother, staring at them oddly. "Isabel?" he repeated. "What's this?"

"You interrupted our theatricals. I was rehearsing an impassioned proposal to your beloved stepmother," O'Reilly explained, with a pretense of annoyance.

"Yes, Señor O'Reilly believes he can infuriate Isabel by laying siege to her. He's a—foolish person—" Rosa's cheeks were faintly flushed and her color deepened at the amusement in Estéban's eyes. "He makes love wretchedly."

"What little I overheard wasn't bad," Estéban de-declared; then he took O'Reilly's hand.

Estéban was a handsome boy, straight, slim, and manly, and his resemblance to Rosa was startling. With a look engaging in its frank directness, he said: "Rosa

told me about your meetings here and I came to apologize for our stepmother's discourtesy. I'm sorry we can't invite you into our house, but—you understand? Rosa and I are not like her; we are quite liberal in our views; we are almost Americans, as you see. I dare say that's what makes Isabel hate Americans so bitterly."

"Wouldn't it please her to know that I'm becoming Cubanized as fast as ever I can?" ventured the caller.

"Oh, she hates Cubans, too!" laughed the brother. "She's Spanish, you know. Well, it's fortunate you didn't see her to-day. Br-r! What a temper! We had our theatricals, too. I asked her for money, as usual, and, as usual, she refused. It was like a scene from a play. She'll walk in her sleep to-night, if ever."

Rosa nodded soberly, and O'Reilly, suppressing some light reply that had sprung to his lips, inquired, curiously, "What do you mean by that?"

Brother and sister joined in explaining that Doña Isabel was given to peculiar actions, especially after periods of excitement or anger, and that one of her eccentricities had taken the form of somnambulistic wanderings. "Oh, she's crazy enough," Estéban concluded. "I believe it's her evil conscience."

Rosa explained further: "She used to steal about at night, hoping to surprise papa or Sebastian going or coming from the treasure. They were both killed, as you know, and the secret of the hiding-place was lost. Now Isabel declares that they come to her in her sleep and that she has to help them hunt for it, whether she wishes or not. It is retribution." The speaker drew up her shoulders and shivered, but Estéban smiled.

"Bah!" he exclaimed. "I'll believe in ghosts when I see one." Then, with a shake of his head: "Isabel has never given up the hope of finding that treasure. She would like to see Rosa married, and me fighting with the Insurrectos, so that she might have a free hand in her search."

O'Reilly scanned the speaker silently for a moment; then he said, with a gravity unusual in him, "I wonder if you know that you're suspected of—working for the Insurrecto cause."

"Indeed? I didn't know."

"Well, it's a fact." O'Reilly heard Rosa gasp faintly. "Is it true?" he asked.

"I am a Cuban." Estéban's smile was a trifle grim.

"Cuban? Your people were Spanish."

"True. But no Spaniard ever raised a Spanish child in Cuba. We are Cubans, Rosa and I."

At this statement the sister cried: "Hush! It is dangerous to speak in that way, with this new war growing every day."

"But O'Reilly is our good friend," Estéban protested.

"Of course I am," the American agreed, "and for that reason I spoke. I hope you're not too deeply involved with the rebels."

"There, Estéban! Do you hear?" Turning to O'Reilly, Rosa said, imploringly: "Please reason with him. He's young and headstrong and he won't listen to me."

Estéban frowned. "Young, eh? Well, sometimes the young are called upon to do work that older men wouldn't care to undertake."

"What work?" O'Reilly's eyes were still upon him. "You can tell *me*."

"I think I can," the other agreed. "Well, then, I know everybody in Matanzas; I go everywhere, and the Spanish officers talk plainly before me. Somebody must be the eyes and the ears for Colonel Lopez."

"Colonel Lopez!" exclaimed O'Reilly.

Estéban nodded.

Rosa's face, as she looked at the two men, was white and worried. For a time the three of them sat silent; then the American said, slowly, "You'll be shot if you're caught."

Rosa whispered: "Yes! Think of it!"

"Some one must run chances," Estéban averred. "We're fighting tyranny; all Cuba is ablaze. I must do my part."

"But sooner or later you'll be discovered—then what?" persisted O'Reilly.

Estéban shrugged. "Who knows? There'll be time enough when—"

"What of Rosa?"

At this question the brother stirred uneasily and dropped his eyes. O'Reilly laid a hand upon his arm. "You have no right to jeopardize her safety. Without you, to whom could she turn?" The girl flashed her admirer a grateful glance.

"Señor, you for one would see that she—"

"But—I'm going away." O'Reilly felt rather than saw Rosa start, for his face was averted. Purposely he kept his gaze upon Estéban, for he didn't wish to see the slow pallor that rose in the girl's cheeks, the look of pain that crept into her eyes. "I came here to tell you both goodby. I may be gone for some time. I—I don't know when I can get back."

"I'm sorry," Estéban told him, with genuine regret. "We have grown very fond of you. You will leave many friends here in Matanzas, I'm sure. But you will come back before long, eh?"

"Yes, as soon as I can. That is, if—" He did not finish the sentence.

"Good. You're one of us. In the mean time I'll remember what you say, and at least I'll be careful." By no means wanting in tact, Estéban rose briskly and, after shaking hands with O'Reilly, left the two lovers to say farewell as best suited them.

But for once O'Reilly's ready tongue was silent. The laughter was gone from his blue eyes when he turned to the girl at his side.

"You say you are going away?" Rosa inquired, breathlessly. "But why?"

"I'm going partly because of this war, and partly because of—something else. I tried to tell you yesterday, but I couldn't. When the revolution started everybody thought it was merely a local uprising, and I wrote my company to that effect; but, bless you, it has spread like fire, and now the whole eastern end of the island is ablaze."

"Estéban says it will be more terrible than the Ten Years' War."

"God forbid! And yet all the old fighters are back again. Nobody believed that Maximo Gomez had returned, but it's true. And the Maceos are here, too, from Costa Rica. Antonio has already gained control of most of Santiago Province, and he's sweeping westward. Of course the Spaniards minimize the reports of his success, and we, here, don't understand what's really going on. Anyhow, business has stopped, and my employers have ordered me home to find out what's happened to their profits. They seem to hold me personally responsible for this insurrection."

"I see. And when you have told them the truth you will come back. Is that it?"

"I— Perhaps."

"You said there was something else—"

O'Reilly's hesitation became an embarrassed silence. He tried to laugh it off.

"There is, otherwise I'd stay right here and tell my penurious friends to whistle for their profits. It seems I'm cursed with a fatal beauty. You may have noticed it? No? Well, perhaps it's a magnificent business ability that I have. Anyhow, the president of my company has a notion that I'd make him a good son-in-law."

"I— Oh!" cried Rosa.

And at her tone O'Reilly hurried on:

"These rich men have the most absurd ideas. I suppose I'll have to—"

"Then you are in love, señor?"

The young man nodded vigorously. "Indeed I am—with the sweetest girl in Cuba. That's the whole trouble. That's why I'm hurrying home to resign before I'm fired." Not daring to look too long or too deeply into Rosa Varona's eyes until she had taken in the whole truth, he waited, staring at his feet. "I'm sort of glad it has come to a show-down and I can speak out. I'm hoping she'll miss me." After a moment he ventured, "Will she—er—will you, Rosa?"

"I? Miss you?" Rosa lifted her brows in pretended amazement. Then she tipped her head daintily to one side, as if weighing his question earnestly. "You are amusing, of course, but—I won't have much time to think about you, for I am so soon to be married."

"Married? *What?* O'Reilly started violently, and the girl exclaimed, with well-feigned concern:

"Oh, señor! You have wounded yourself again on that thorn-bush. This place is growing up to brambles."

"It wasn't my finger! Something pierced me through the heart. *Married?* Nonsense!"

"Indeed! Do you think I'm so ugly nobody would have me?"

"Good Lord! You—" O'Reilly swallowed hard. "I won't tell you the truth when you know it so well."

"The richest man in Matanzas asked for my hand this very afternoon."

"Who? Mario de Castaño?"

"Yes."

O'Reilly laughed with relief, and though Rosa tried to look offended, she was forced to smile. "He's fat, I know," she admitted, "and he makes funny noises when he breathes; but he is richer than Crœsus, and I adore rich men."

"I hate 'em!" announced O'Reilly. Then for a second time he took Rosa's dimpled hand, saying, earnestly: "I'm sure you know now why I make love so badly, dear. It's my Irish conscience. And you'll wait until I come back, won't you?"

"Will you be gone—very long?" she asked.

O'Reilly looked deeply now into the dark eyes turned to his, and found that at last there was no coquetry in them anywhere—nothing but a lonesome, hungry yearning—and with a glad, incoherent exclamation he held out his arms. Rosa Varona crept into them; then with a sigh she upturned her lips to his.

"I'll wait forever," she said.

IV

RETRIBUTION

ALTHOUGH for a long time Doña Isabel had been sure in her own mind that Pancho Cueto, her *administrador*, was robbing her, she had never mustered courage to call him to a reckoning. And there was a reason for her cowardice. Nevertheless, De Castaño's blunt accusation, coupled with her own urgent needs, served to fix her resolution, and on the day after the merchant's visit she sent for the overseer, who at the time was living on one of the plantations.

Once the message was on its way, Isabel fell into a condition bordering upon panic, and was half minded to countermand her order. She spent an evening of suspense, and a miserable night. This last, however, was nothing unusual with her; she was accustomed to unpleasant dreams, and she was not surprised when old familiar shapes came to harass her. Nor, in view of her somnambulistic vagaries, was she greatly concerned to find, when she woke in the morning, that her slippers were stained and that her skirt was bedraggled with dew and filled with burs.

Scarcely a month passed that she did not walk in her sleep.

Cueto was plainly curious to learn why he had been sent for, but since he asked no questions, his employer was forced to open the subject herself. Several times he led up to it unsuccessfully; then she took the plunge. Through dry, white lips she began:

"My dear Pancho, times are hard. The plantations are failing, and so—" Pancho Cueto's eyes were set close to his nose, his face was long and thin and harsh; he regarded the speaker with such a sinister, unblinking stare that she could scarcely finish: "—and so I—can no longer afford to retain you as administrador."

"Times will improve," he said.

"Impossible! This war threatens to bring utter ruin; and now that Estéban and Rosa are home they spend money like water. I groan with poverty."

"Yes, they are extravagant. It is the more reason for me to remain in your service."

"No, no! I tell you I'm bankrupt."

"So? Then the remedy is simple—sell a part of your land."

Although this suggestion came naturally enough, Doña Isabel turned cold, and felt her smile stiffen into a grimace. She wondered if Cueto could be feeling her out deliberately. "Sell the Varona lands?" she queried, after a momentary struggle with herself. "Estéban would rise from his grave. No. It was his wish that the plantations go to his children intact."

"And his wish is sacred to you, eh?" Cueto nodded his approval, although his smile was disconcerting. "An admirable sentiment! It does you honor! But speaking on this subject, I am reminded of that dispute with José Oroz over the boundary to La Joya. He is a rascal, that Oroz; he would steal the sap out of your standing cane if he could. I have promised to show him the original deed to La Joya and to furnish him with the proofs about the boundary line. That would be better than a lawsuit, wouldn't it?"

"Decidedly! But—I will settle with him myself."

Cueto lifted an admonitory hand, his face alight with the faintest glimmer of ironic mirth. "I couldn't trust you to the mercies of that rascal," he said, piously. "No,

I shall go on as I am, even at a sacrifice to myself. I love Don Estéban's children as my very own; and you, señora—"

Isabel knew that she must win a complete victory at once or accept irretrievable defeat.

"Never!" she interrupted, with a tone of finality. "I can't accept your sacrifice. I am not worthy. Kindly arrange to turn over your books of account at once. I shall make you as handsome a present as my circumstances will permit in recognition of your long and faithful service."

Then Pancho Cueto did an unexpected thing: he laughed shortly and shook his head.

Doña Isabel was ready to faint and her voice quavered as she went on: "Understand me, we part the best of friends despite all I have heard against you. I do not believe these stories people tell, for you probably have enemies. Even if all they say were true I should force myself to be lenient because of your affection for my husband."

The man rose, still smiling. "It is I who have been lenient," said he.

"Eh? Speak plainly."

"Gladly. I have long suspected that Don Estéban hid the deeds of his property with the rest of his valuables, and now that you admit—"

Doña Isabel recoiled sharply. "Admit! Are you mad? Deeds! What are you talking about?" Her eyes met his bravely enough, but she could feel her lips trembling loosely.

Casting aside all pretense, the overseer exclaimed: "Por el amor de Dios! An end to this! I know why you sent for me. You think I have been robbing you. Well, to be honest, so I have. Why should I toil as I do while you and those twins live here in luxury and idleness, squandering money to which you have no right?"

"Have I lost my reason?" gasped the widow. "No right?"

"At least no better right than I. Don't you understand? You have no title to those plantations! They are mine, for I have paid the taxes out of my own pockets now these many years."

"Taxes! What do you mean?"

"I paid them. The receipts are in my name."

"God! Such perfidy! And you who knew him!"

"The deeds have been lost for so long that the property would have reverted to the crown had it not been for me. You doubt that, eh? Well, appeal to the court and you will find that it is true. For that matter, the officials make new laws to fit each case, and should they learn that Estéban Varona died intestate they would arrange somehow to seize all his property and leave you without a roof over your head. Fortunately I can prevent that, for I have a title that will stand, in want of a better one."

There was a momentary silence while the unhappy woman struggled with herself. Then:

"You took advantage of my ignorance of business to rob me," she declared. "Well, I know something about the Government officials: if they would make a law to fit my case they will make one to fit yours. When I tell them what you have done perhaps you will not fare so well with them as you expect." She was fighting now with the desperation of one cornered.

"Perhaps." Cueto shrugged. "That is what I want to talk to you about, if only you will be sensible. Now then, let us be frank. Inasmuch as we're both in much the same fix, hadn't we better continue our present arrangements?" He stared unblinkingly at his listener. "Oh, I mean it! Is it not better for you to be content with what my generosity prompts me to give, rather than to risk ruin for both of us by grasping for too much?"

"Merciful God! The outrage! I warrant you have

grown rich through your stealing." Isabel's voice had gone flat with consternation.

"Rich? Well, not exactly, but comfortably well off." Cueto actually smiled again. "No doubt my frankness is a shock to you. You are angry at my proposition, eh? Never mind. You will think better of it in time, if you are a sensible woman."

"What a fiend! Have you no sentiment?"

"Oh, señora! I am all sentiment. Don Estéban was my benefactor. I revere his memory, and I feel it my duty to see that his family does not want. That is why I have provided for you, and will continue to provide—in proper measure. But now, since at last we enjoy such confidential relations, let us have no more of these miserable suspicions of each other. Let us entirely forget this unpleasant misunderstanding and be the same good friends as before."

Having said this, Pancho Cueto stood silent a moment in polite expectancy; then receiving no intelligible reply, he bowed low and left the room.

To the avaricious Doña Isabel Cueto's frank acknowledgment of theft was maddening, and the realization that she was helpless, nay, dependent upon his charity for her living, fairly crucified her proud spirit.

All day she brooded, and by the time evening came she had worked herself into such a state of nerves that she could eat no dinner. Locking herself into her room, she paced the floor, now wringing her hands, now twisting in agony upon her bed, now biting her wrists in an endeavor to clear her head and to devise some means of outwitting this treacherous overseer. But mere thought of the law frightened her; the longer she pondered her situation the more she realized her own impotence. There was no doubt that the courts were corrupt: they were notoriously venal at best, and this war had made them worse. Graft was rampant everywhere. To confess publicly that

Estéban Varona had left no deeds, no title to his property, would indeed be the sheerest folly. No, Cueto had her at his mercy.

Sometime during the course of the evening a wild idea came to Isabel. Knowing that the manager would spend the night beneath her roof, she planned to kill him. At first it seemed a simple thing to do—merely a matter of a dagger or a pistol, while he slept—but further thought revealed appalling risks and difficulties, and she decided to wait. Poison was far safer.

That night she lay awake a long time putting her scheme into final shape, and then for an interval that seemed longer she hung poised in those penumbral regions midway between wakefulness and slumber. Through her mind meanwhile there passed a whirling phantasmagoria, an interminable procession of figures, of memories, real yet unreal, convincing yet unconvincing. When she did at last lose all awareness of reality the effect was merely to enhance the vividness of those phantoms, to lend substance to her vaporous visions.

Constant brooding over the treasure had long since affected Doña Isabel's brain, and as a consequence she often dreamed about it. She dreamed about it again tonight, and, strangely enough, her dreams were pleasant. Sebastian appeared, but for once he neither cursed nor threatened her; and Estéban, when he came, was again the lover who had courted her in Habana. It was all very wonderful, very exciting, very real. Doña Isabel found herself robed for him in her wedding-gown of white, and realized that she was beautiful. It seemed also as if her powers of attraction were magically enhanced, for she exercised a potent influence over him. Her senses were quickened a thousandfold, too. For instance, she could see great distances—a novel and agreeable sensation; she enjoyed strange, unsuspected perfumes; she heard the music of distant waterfalls and understood the whispered

language of the breeze. It was amazing, delightful. Estéban and she were walking through the grounds of the *quinta* and he was telling her about his casks of Spanish sovereigns, about those boxes bound with iron, about the gold and silver ornaments of heavenly beauty and the pearls as large as plums. As he talked, Isabel felt herself grow hot and cold with anticipation; she experienced spasms of delight. She felt that she must dance, must run, must cast her arms aloft in ecstasy. Never had she experienced so keen an intoxication of joy as now, while Estéban was leading her toward the treasure and wooing her with youthful ardor.

Then of a sudden Isabel's whole dream-world dissolved. She awoke, or thought she did, at hearing her name shouted. But although she underwent the mental and the physical shock of being startled from slumber, although she felt the first swift fright of a person aroused to strange surroundings, she knew on the instant that she must still be asleep; for everything about her was dim and dark, the air was cold and damp, wet grass rose to her knees. It flashed through her mind that she had simply been whirled from a pleasant dream into one of terror. As she fought with herself to throw off the illusion of this nightmare its reality became overwhelming. Warring, incongruous sensations, far too swift for her mind to compass, were crowded into the minutest fraction of time. Before she could half realize her own condition she felt herself plunged into space. Now the sensation of falling was not strange to Isabel—it is common to all sufferers from nightmare—nevertheless, she experienced the dawn of a horror such as she had never guessed. She heard herself scream hoarsely, fearfully, and knew, too late, that she was indeed awake. Then—whirling chaos— A sudden, blinding crash of lights and sounds— Nothing more!

Estéban Varona sat until a late hour that night over

a letter which required the utmost care in its composition. It was written upon the thinnest of paper, and when it was finished the writer inclosed it in an envelope of the same material. Estéban put the letter in his pocket without addressing it. Then he extinguished his light, tiptoed to the door connecting his and Rosa's rooms, and listened. No sound whatever came to his ears, for his sister slept like a kitten. Reassured, he stole out into the hall. Here he paused a moment with his ear first to Pancho Cueto's door, and then to the door of his stepmother's room. He could hear the overseer's heavy breathing and Isabel's senseless babbling—the latter was moaning and muttering ceaselessly, but, being accustomed to her restlessness, Estéban paid no heed.

Letting himself out into the night, he took the path that led to the old sunken garden. Nocturnal birds were chirruping; his way was barred with spider-webs, heavy with dew and gleaming in the moonlight like tiny ropes of jewels; the odor of gardenias was overpowering. He passed close by the well, and its gaping black mouth, only half protected by the broken coping, reminded him that he had promised Rosa to cover it with planks. In its present condition it was a menace to animals, if not to human beings who were unaware of its presence. He told himself he would attend to it on the morrow.

Seating himself on one of the old stone benches, the young man lit a cigarette and composed himself to wait. He sat there for a long time, grumbling inwardly, for the night was damp and he was sleepy; but at last a figure stole out of the gloom and joined him. The new-comer was a ragged negro, dressed in the fashion of the poorer country people.

"Well, Asensio, I thought you'd never come. I'll get a fever from this!" Estéban said, irritably.

"It is a long way, Don Estéban, and Evangelina made me wait until dark. I tell you we have to be careful these days."

"What is the news? What did you hear?"

Asensio sighed gratefully as he seated himself. "One hears a great deal, but one never knows what to believe. There is fighting in Santa Clara, and Maceo sweeps westward."

Taking the unaddressed letter from his pocket, Estéban said, "I have another message for Colonel Lopez."

"That Lopez! He's here to-day and there to-morrow; one can never find him."

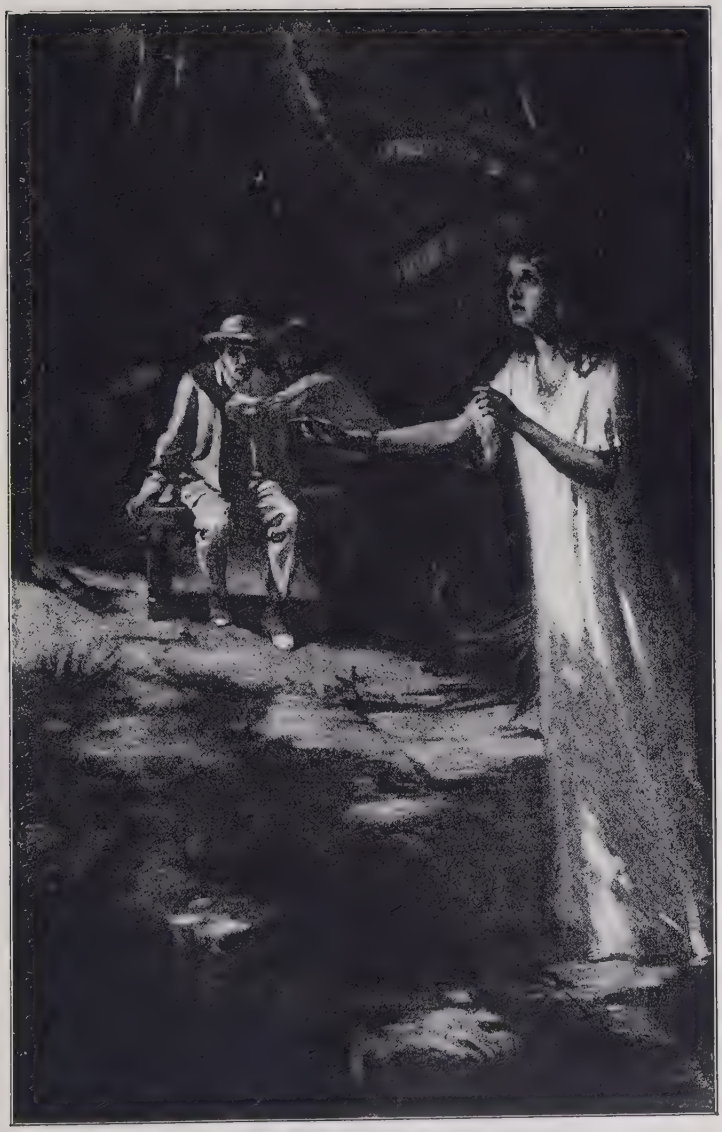
"Well, you must find him, and immediately, Asensio. This letter contains important news—so important, in fact"—Estéban laughed lightly—"that if you find yourself in danger from the Spaniards I'd advise you to chew it up and swallow it as quickly as you can."

"I'll remember that," said the negro, "for there's danger enough. Still, I fear these Spaniards less than the guerrilleros: they are everywhere. They call themselves patriots, but they are nothing more than robbers. They—"

Asensio paused abruptly. He seized his companion by the arm and, leaning forward, stared across the level garden into the shadows opposite. Something was moving there, under the trees; the men could see that it was white and formless, and that it pursued an erratic course.

"What's that?" gasped the negro. He began to tremble violently and his breath became audible. Estéban was compelled to hold him down by main force. "Jesus Cristo! It's old Don Estéban, your father. They say he walks at midnight, carrying his head in his two hands."

Young Varona managed to whisper, with some show of courage: "Hush! Wait! I don't believe in ghosts." Nevertheless, he was on the point of setting Asensio an example of undignified flight when the mysterious object emerged from the shadows into the open moonlight; then he sighed with relief: "Ah-h! Now I see! It is my stepmother. She is asleep."



"AH-H! NOW I SEE! IT IS MY STEPMOTHER. SHE IS ASLEEP"

"Asleep?" Asensio was incredulous. He was still so unnerved by his first fright that Estéban dared not release him.

"Yes; her eyes are open, but she sees nothing."

"I don't like such things," the negro confessed in a shaky voice. "How can she walk if she is asleep? If her eyes are open, how can she help seeing us? You know she hates Evangelina and me."

"I tell you she sees nothing, knows nothing—" For a moment or two they watched the progress of the white-robed figure; then Estéban stirred and rose from his seat. "She's too close to that well. There is—" He started forward a pace or two. "They say people who walk at night go mad if they're awakened too suddenly, and yet—"

Doña Isabel was talking in a low, throaty, unnatural tone. Her words were meaningless, but the effect, at that hour and in those surroundings, was bizarre and fearsome. Estéban felt his scalp prickling uncomfortably. This was very creepy.

When the somnambulist's deliberate progress toward the mouth of the well continued he called her name softly. "Doña Isabel!" Then he repeated it louder. "Doña Isabel! Wake up."

The woman seemed to hear and yet not to hear. She turned her head to listen, but continued to walk.

"Don't be alarmed," he said, reassuringly. "It is only Estéban—*Doña Isabel! Stop!*" Estéban sprang forward, shouting at the top of his voice, for at the sound of his name Isabel had abruptly swerved to her right, a movement which brought her dangerously close to the lip of the well.

"STOP! GO BACK!" screamed the young man.

Above his warning there came a shriek, shrill and agonized—a wail of such abysmal terror as to shock the night birds and the insects into stillness. Doña Isabel slipped, or stumbled, to her knees, she balanced briefly,

clutching at random while the earth and crumbling cement gave way beneath her; then she slid forward and disappeared, almost out from between Estéban's hands. There was a noisy rattle of rock and pebble and a great splash far below; a chuckle of little stones striking the water, then a faint bubbling. Nothing more. The stepson stood in his tracks, sick, blind with horror; he was swaying over the opening when Asensio dragged him back.

Pancho Cueto, being a heavy sleeper, was the last to be roused by Estéban's outcries. When he had hurriedly slipped into his clothes in response to the pounding on his door, the few servants that the establishment supported had been thoroughly awakened. Estéban was shouting at them, explaining that Doña Isabel had met with an accident. He was calling for a lantern, too, and a stout rope. Cueto thought they must all be out of their minds until he learned what had befallen the mistress of the house. Then, being a man of action, he, too, issued swift orders, with the result that by the time he and Estéban had run to the well both rope and lantern were ready for their use. Before Estéban could form and fit a loop for his shoulders there was sufficient help on hand to lower him into the treacherous abyss.

It was a commentary upon Doña Isabel's character that during the long, slow moments of uncertainty while Estéban was being lowered the negroes exhibited more curiosity than concern over her fate. In half-pleased excitement they whispered and giggled and muttered together, while Pancho lay prone at the edge of the orifice, directing them how to manipulate the rope.

That was a gruesome task which fell to Estéban, for the well had been long unused, its sides were oozing slime, its waters were stale and black. He was on the point of fainting when he finally climbed out, leaving the negroes to hoist the dripping, inert weight which he had found at the bottom.

Old Sebastian's curse had come true; Doña Isabel had met the fate he had called down upon her that day when he hung exhausted in his chains and when the flies tormented him. The treasure for which the woman had intrigued so tirelessly had been her death. Like an *ignis fatuus*, it had lured her to destruction. Furthermore, as if in grimmest irony, she had been permitted at the very last to find it. Living, she had searched to no purpose whatsoever; dying, she had almost grasped it in her arms.

Once the first excitement had abated and a messenger had been sent to town, Cueto drew Estéban aside and questioned him.

"A shocking tragedy and most peculiar," said the overseer. "Nothing could amaze me more."

"Exactly! And all because of her sleep-walking. I'm all in a tremble."

"She was asleep? You are sure?"

"Have I not told you so?" Estéban was impatient.

"But it is said that people given to that peculiarity never come to grief. They say some sixth sense guides them—gives them warning of pitfalls and dangers. I—I can't understand—"

"That well was a menace to a waking person. I didn't realize how near to it she was; and when I cried out to her it seemed only to hasten her steps." The young man shuddered, for the horror of the thing was still in his mind.

"Tell me, how did you come to be there at such an hour, eh?"

Estéban saw the malevolent curiosity in Cueto's face and started. "I— That is my affair. Surely you don't think—"

"Come, come! You can trust me." The overseer winked and smiled.

"I had business that took me there," stiffly declared the younger man.

"Exactly! And a profitable business it proved!" Cueto laughed openly now. "Well, I don't mind telling you, Doña Isabel's death is no disappointment to any one. Anybody could see—"

"Stop!" Estéban was turning alternately red and white. "You seem to imply something outrageous."

"Now let us be sensible. I understand you perfectly, my boy. But an officer of the Guardia Civil may arrive at any moment and he will want to know how you came to be with your stepmother when she plunged into that trap. So prepare yourself. If only you had not given the alarm. If only you had waited until morning. But —in the dead of night! Alone! He will think it queer. Suppose, too, he learns that you and Doña Isabel quarreled the other day over money matters?"

Young Varona recovered himself quickly. He was watching his inquisitor now with a faintly speculative frown. When Cueto had finished, Estéban said:

"Doña Isabel and I frequently quarreled over money matters, so there is nothing strange in that. You would like me to confess to some black iniquity that would make us better friends, eh? Well, it so happens that I was not alone to-night, but that another person saw the poor woman's death and can bear me out in everything I say. No, Pancho, you overreach yourself. Now then''— Estéban was quick-tempered, and for years he had struggled against an instinctive distrust and dislike of the plantation manager—"remember that I have become the head of this house, and your employer. You will do better to think of your own affairs than of mine. Do you understand me? I have long suspected that certain matters of yours need attention, and at the first opportunity I intend to have a careful reckoning with you. I think you know I have a good head for figures." Turning his back upon the elder man, he walked away.

Now it did not occur to Cueto really to doubt the boy's

innocence, though the circumstances of Doña Isabel's death were suspicious enough to raise a question in any mind; but in view of Estéban's threat he thought it wise to protect himself by setting a back-fire. It was with some such vague idea in his head that he turned to the sunken garden as the first gray light of dawn appeared. He hoped to gain some inspiration by examining the place again, and, as it proved, he succeeded beyond his most sanguine expectations.

As he sat on an old stone bench, moodily repicturing the catastrophe as Estéban had described it, his attention fell upon an envelope at his feet. It was sealed; it was unaddressed. Cueto idly broke it open and began to read. Before he had gone far he started; then he cast a furtive glance about. But the place was secluded; he was unobserved. When he finished reading he rose, smiling. He no longer feared Estéban. On the contrary, he rather pitied the young fool; for here between his fingers was that which not only promised to remove the boy from his path forever, but to place in his hands the entire Varona estates. Fate was kind. After years of patient scheming Cueto had obtained his reward.

One afternoon, perhaps a week later, Don Mario de Castaño came puffing and blowing up to the *quinta*, demanding to see Rosa without a moment's delay. The girl appeared before her caller had managed to dry up the streams of perspiration resulting from his exertions. With a directness unusual even in him Don Mario began:

"Rosa, my dear, you and Estéban have been discovered! I was at lunch with the comandante when I learned the truth. Through friendship I prevailed upon him to give you an hour's grace."

"What do you mean, Don Mario?" inquired the girl.

"Come, come!" the planter cried, impatiently. "Don't you see you can trust me? God! The recklessness, the folly of young people! Could you not leave this insur-

rection to your elders? Or perhaps you thought it a matter of no great importance, an amusing thing—"

"Don Mario!" Rosa interrupted. "I don't know what you are talking about."

"You don't, eh?" The caller's wet cheeks grew redder; he blew like a porpoise. "Then call Estéban quickly! There is not a moment to lose." When the brother appeared De Castaño blurted out at him accusingly: "Well, sir! A fine fix you've put yourself in. I came here to warn you, but Rosa pretends ignorance. Perhaps you will be interested to learn that Colonel Fernandez has issued orders to arrest you and your sister as agents of the Insurrectos."

"What?" Estéban drew back. Rosa turned white as a lily and laid a fluttering hand upon her throat.

"You two will sleep to-night in San Severino," grimly announced the rotund visitor. "You know what that means. Cubans who enter the Castillo seldom come out. Have you noticed the big sharks that swim about under the walls of it? Do you know what bait keeps them there? Well, I'll tell you! It's the bodies of rebel sympathizers—foolish people like you who call themselves patriots."

Rosa uttered a smothered cry.

"Colonel Fernandez," Don Mario proceeded, impressively, "did me this favor, knowing me to be a suitor for Rosa's hand. In spite of his duty and the evidence he—"

"Evidence? What evidence?" Estéban asked, sharply.

"For one thing, your own letter to Lopez, the rebel, warning him to beware of the trap prepared for him in Santa Clara, and advising him of the Government force at Sabanilla. Oh, don't try to deny it! I read it with my own eyes, and it means—death."

In the ensuing silence the fat man's asthmatic breathing sounded loudly; it was like the respirations of an excited eavesdropper.

At last Rosa said, faintly: "Estéban! I warned you."

Estéban was taken aback, but it was plain that he was not in the least frightened. "They haven't caught me yet," he laughed.

"You say they intend to arrest me also?" Rosa eyed the caller anxiously.

"Exactly!"

"But why?"

"Yes! Who accuses her, and of what?" Estéban indignantly demanded.

"That also I have discovered through the courtesy of Colonel Fernandez. Your accuser is none other than Pancho Cueto."

"Cueto!"

"Yes, he has denounced both of you as rebels, and the letter is only part of his proof, I believe. I don't know what other evidence he has, but, take my word for it, the Government does not require much proof these days. Suspicion is enough. Now, then, you can guess why I am here. I am not without influence; I can save Rosa, but for you, Estéban, I fear I can do nothing. You must look out for yourself. Well? What do you say? We're wasting precious time standing here with our mouths open."

When Estéban saw how pale his sister had grown, he took her in his arms, saying, gently: "I'm sorry, dear. It's all my fault." Then to the merchant, "It was very good of you to warn us."

"Ha!" Don Mario fanned himself. "I'm glad you appreciate my efforts. It's a good thing to have the right kind of a friend. I'll marry Rosa within an hour, and I fancy my name will be a sufficient shield—"

Rosa turned to her elderly suitor and made a deep courtesy. "I am unworthy of the honor," said she. "You see, I—I do not love you, Don Mario."

"Love!" exploded the visitor. "God bless you! What has love to do with the matter? Estéban will have to

ride for his life in ten minutes and your property will be seized. So you had better make yourself ready to go with me."

But Rosa shook her head.

"Eh? What ails you? What do you expect to do?"

"I shall go with Estéban," said the girl.

This calm announcement seemed to stupefy De Castaño. He sat down heavily in the nearest chair, and with his wet handkerchief poised in one pudgy hand he stared fixedly at the speaker. His eyes were round and bulging, the sweat streamed unheeded from his temples. He resembled some queer bloated marine monster just emerged from the sea and momentarily dazzled by the light.

"You— You're mad," he finally gasped. "Estéban, tell her what it means."

But this Estéban could not do, for he himself had not the faintest notion of what was in store for him. War seemed to him a glorious thing; he had been told that the hills were peopled with patriots. He was very young, his heart was ablaze with hatred for the Spaniards and for Pancho Cueto. He longed to risk his life for a free Cuba. Therefore he said: "Rosa shall do as she pleases. If we must be exiles we shall share each other's hardships. It will not be for long."

"Idiot!" stormed the fat man. "Better that you gave her to the sharks below San Severino. There is no law, no safety for women outside of the cities. The island is in anarchy. These patriots you talk about are the blacks, the mulattoes, the—lowest, laziest savages in Cuba."

"Please! Don Mario!" the girl pleaded. "I cannot marry you, for—I love another."

"Eh?"

"I love another. I'm betrothed to O'Reilly, the American—and he's coming back to marry me."

De Castaño twisted himself laboriously out of his chair and waddled toward the door. He was purple with rage

and mortification. On the threshold he paused to wheeze: "Very well, then. Go! I'm done with both of you. I would have lent you a hand with this rascal Cueto, but now he will fall heir to your entire property. Well, it is a time for bandits! I—I—" Unable to think of a parting speech sufficiently bitter to match his disappointment, Don Mario plunged out into the sunlight, muttering and stammering to himself.

Within an hour the twins were on their way up the Yumuri, toward the home of Asensio and Evangelina; for it was thither that they naturally turned. It was well that they had made haste, for as they rode down into the valley, up the other side of the hill from Matanzas came a squad of the *Guardia Civil*, and at its head rode Pancho Cueto.

V

A CRY FROM THE WILDERNESS

NEW YORK seemed almost like a foreign city to Johnnie O'Reilly when he stepped out into it on the morning after his arrival. For one thing it was bleak and cold: the north wind, hailing direct from Baffin's Bay, had teeth, and it bit so cruelly that he was glad when he found shelter in the building which housed the offices of the Carter Importing Company. The tropics had thinned O'Reilly's blood, for the Cuban winds bear a kiss instead of a sting; therefore he paused in the lower hallway, jostled by the morning crowds, and tried to warm himself. The truth is O'Reilly was not only cold, but frightened.

He was far from weak-hearted. In fact, few O'Reillys were that, and Johnnie had an ingrained self-assurance which might have been mistaken for impudence, but for the winning smile that went with it. Yet all the way from Havana he had seen in his mind's eye old Sam Carter intrenched behind his flat-topped desk, and that picture had more than once caused him to forget the carefully rehearsed speech in which he intended to resign his position as an employee and his prospects as a son-in-law.

That desk of Mr. Carter's was always bare and orderly, cleared for action, like the deck of a battle-ship, and over it many engagements had been fought, for the man behind it never shirked a conflict. His was a vigorous and

irascible temperament, compounded of old-fashioned, slow-burning black powder and nitroglycerine—a combination of incalculable destructive power. It was a perilously unstable mixture, too: at times nothing less than a flame served to ignite it; on other occasions the office force pussy-footed past Carter's door on felt soles, and even then the slightest jar often caused the untoward thing to let go. In either event there was a deafening roar, much smoke, and a deal of damage. O'Reilly felt sure that whatever the condition of Mr. Carter's digestion or the serenity of his mind at the beginning of their interview, the news he had to impart would serve as an effective detonator, after which it would be every man for himself. It was not the effect of his report concerning the firm's unprofitable Cuban connections which O'Reilly feared would cause the decks to heave and the ship to rock—Samuel Carter could take calmly the most disturbing financial reverse—it was the blow to his pride at learning that anybody could prefer another girl to his daughter. Johnnie shook his shoulders and stamped his feet, but the chill in his bones refused to go.

He did gain courage, however, by thinking of Rosa Varona as he had last seen her, with arms outstretched, with eyes tear-filled, with yearning lips aquiver at his going. The picture warmed him magically, and it was with a restored determination to make a clean breast of the matter and face the worst that he took the elevator.

The office force of the Carter Importing Company looked up when the firm's Cuban representative entered the door, but its personnel having changed as the result of one of those periodical disruptions that occurred in the inner office, he was not recognized until he presented himself to Mr. Slack, Samuel Carter's private and intimidated secretary.

Mr. Slack smiled wanly, and extended a clammy, nerveless hand as cold and limber as a dead fish.

"You're expected," said he. "Mr. Carter is waiting to see you before leaving for California."

"Seeing me won't make his trip any pleasanter," O'Reilly said, somberly.

"We were afraid you wouldn't get out of Cuba; thought we might have to get the American consul at work."

"Really? I didn't know I was so important."

"Oh, you're the office pet, and well you know it." Mr. Slack's pleasantry was tinged with envy, for he had never been able to appreciate O'Reilly. "Conditions are bad, eh?"

"Yes. Anybody can leave," the other told him. "It's getting back that's difficult. The Spaniards don't like us, and I dare say they have good reason, with all this talk of intervention and the secret help we're lending the Insurrectos. They held me up in Havana; tried to prove I was a spy. They were positively peeved when they failed. Snippy people, those Spaniards."

"Well, I'll tell Mr. Carter you're here." The secretary glided unobtrusively toward the private office, disappeared, glided softly into view again, and waggled a boneless forefinger invitingly. O'Reilly went to meet his employer as a man marches to execution.

His heart sank further at the welcome he received, for the importer gave him a veritable embrace; he patted him on the back and inquired three times as to his health. O'Reilly was anything but cold now; he was perspiring profusely, and he felt his collar growing limp. To shatter this old man's eager hopes would be like kicking a child in the face. Carter had never been so enthusiastic, so demonstrative; there was something almost theatrical in his greeting. It dismayed O'Reilly immensely to realize what a hold he must have upon his employer's affections. Although the latter had a reputation for self-control, he appeared to be in a perfect flutter now. He assumed a boisterousness which seemed strained and

wholly out of keeping with the circumstances. His actions vaguely reminded the younger man of an ambling draft-horse trying to gallop; and when, for the fourth time, Mr. Carter inquired solicitously concerning his visitor's well-being, Johnnie's dismay turned to amazement. With a heavy playfulness Mr. Carter at length remarked:

"Well, my boy, you made a fizzle of it, didn't you?" The tone was almost complimentary.

"Yes, sir, I'm a bright and shining failure," O'Reilly acknowledged, hopefully.

"Now, don't 'yes, sir' me. We're friends, aren't we? Good! Understand, I don't blame you in the least—it's that idiotic revolution that spoiled our business. I can't understand those people. Lord! You did splendidly, under the circumstances."

"They have reason enough to revolt—oppression, tyranny, corruption." O'Reilly mumbled the familiar words in a numb paralysis at Mr. Carter's jovial familiarity.

"All Latin countries are corrupt," announced the importer—"always have been and always will be. They thrive under oppression. Politics is purely a business proposition with those people. However, I dare say this uprising won't last long."

O'Reilly welcomed this trend of the conversation; anything was better than fulsome praise, and the discussion would delay the coming crash. It seemed strange, however, that Samuel Carter should take time to discourse about generalities. Johnnie wondered why the old man didn't get down to cases.

"It's more than an uprising, sir," he said. "The rebels have overrun the eastern end of the island, and when I left Maceo and Gomez were sweeping west."

"Bah! It takes money to run a war."

"They have money," desperately argued O'Reilly.

"Marti raised more than a million dollars, and every Cuban cigar-maker in the United States gives a part of his wages every week to the cause. The best blood of Cuba is in the fight. The rebels are poorly armed, but if our Government recognizes their belligerency they'll soon fix that. Spain is about busted; she can't stand the strain."

"I predict they'll quit fighting as soon as they get hungry. The Government is starving them out. However, they've wound up our affairs for the time being, and—" Mr. Carter carefully shifted the position of an ink-well, a calendar, and a paper-knife—"that brings us to a consideration of your and my affairs, doesn't it? Ahem! You remember our bargain? I was to give you a chance and you were to make good before you—er—planned any —er—matrimonial foolishness with my daughter."

"Yes, sir." O'Reilly felt that the moment had come for his carefully rehearsed speech, but, unhappily, he could not remember how the swan-song started. He racked his brain for the opening words.

Mr. Carter, too, was unaccountably silent. He opened his lips, then closed them. Both men, after an awkward pause, cleared their throats in unison and eyed each other expectantly. Another moment dragged past, then they chorused:

"I have an unpleasant—"

Each broke off at the echo of his own words.

"What's that?" inquired the importer.

"N-nothing. You were saying—"

"I was thinking how lucky it is that you and Elsa waited. Hm-m! Very fortunate." Again Mr. Carter rearranged his desk fittings. "She has deep feelings—got a conscience, too. Conscience is a fine thing in a woman—so few of 'em have it. We sometimes differ, Elsa and I, but when she sets her heart on a thing I see that she gets it, even if I think she oughtn't to have it.

What's the use of having children if you can't spoil 'em, eh?" He looked up with a sort of resentful challenge, and when his listener appeared to agree with him he sighed with satisfaction. "Early marriages are silly—but she seems to think otherwise. Maybe she's right. Anyhow, she's licked me. I'm done. She wants to be married right away, before we go West. That's why I waited to see you at once. You're a sensible fellow, Johnnie—no foolishness about you. You won't object, will you? We men have to take our medicine."

"It's quite out of the question," stammered the unhappy O'Reilly.

"Come, come! It's tough on you, I know, but—" The fuse had begun to sputter. Johnnie had a horrified vision of himself being dragged unwillingly to the altar. "Elsa is going to have what she wants, if I have to break something. If you'll be sensible I'll stand behind you like a father and teach you the business. I'm getting old, and Ethelbert could never learn it. Otherwise—" The old man's jaw set; his eyes began to gleam angrily.

"Who is—Ethelbert?" faintly inquired O'Reilly.

"Why, dammit! He's the fellow I've been telling you about. He's not so bad as he sounds; he's really a nice boy—"

"Elsa is in love with another man? Is that what you mean?"

"Good Lord, yes! Don't you understand English? I didn't think you'd take it so hard—I was going to make a place for you here in the office, but of course if— Say! What the deuce ails you?"

Samuel Carter stared with amazement, for the injured victim of his daughter's fickleness had leaped to his feet and was shaking his hand vigorously, meanwhile uttering unintelligible sounds that seemed to signify relief, pleasure, delight—anything except what the old man expected.

"Are you crazy, or am I?" he queried.

"Yes, sir; delirious. It's this way, sir; I've changed my mind, too."

"Oh—! You have?"

"I've met the dearest, sweetest"—O'Reilly choked, then began again—"the dearest, loveliest—"

"Never mind the bird-calls—don't coo! I get enough of that at home. Don't tell me she's dearer and sweeter than Elsa. Another girl! Well, I'll be damned! Young man, you're a fool."

"Yes, sir."

Slightly mollified by this ready acknowledgment, Mr. Carter grunted with relief. "Humph! It turned out better than I thought. Why, I—I was positively terrified when you walked in. And to think you didn't need any sympathy!"

"I do need that job, though. It will enable me to get married."

"Nonsense! Better wait. I don't believe in early engagements."

"Oh yes, you do."

"Well, that depends. But, say—you're a pretty nervy youth to turn down my daughter and then hold me up for a job, all in the same breath. Here! Don't dance on my rug. I ought to be offended, and I am, but— Get out while I telephone Elsa, so she can dance, too."

O'Reilly spent that evening in writing a long letter to Rosa Varona. During the next few days his high spirits proved a trial and an affront to Mr. Slack, who, now that his employer had departed for the West, had assumed a subdued and gloomy dignity to match the somber responsibilities of his position.

Other letters went forward by succeeding posts, and there was no doubt now that O'Reilly's pen was tipped with magic! He tingled when he reread what he had written. He bade Rosa prepare for his return and their immediate marriage. The fun and the excitement of

planning their future caused him to fill page after page with thrilling details of the flat-hunting, home-fitting excursions they would take upon their return to New York. He wrote her ecstatic descriptions of a suite of Grand Rapids furniture he had priced; he wasted a thousand emotional words over a set of china he had picked out, and the results of a preliminary trip into the apartment-house district required a convulsive three-part letter to relate. It is remarkable with what poetic fervor, what strength of feeling, a lover can describe a five-room flat; with what glories he can furnish it out of a modest salary and still leave enough for a life of luxury.

But O'Reilly's letters did not always touch upon practical things; there was a wide streak of romance in him, and much of what he wrote was the sort of thing which romantic lovers always write—tender, foolish, worshipful thoughts which half abashed him when he read them over. But that Rosa would thrill to them he had no doubt, nor had he any fear that she would hesitate to leave her native land for him. O'Reilly's love was unlimited; his trust in the girl was absolute. He knew, moreover, that she loved and trusted him. This, to be sure, was a miracle—a unique phenomenon which never ceased to amaze him. He did not dream that every man had felt the same vague wonder.

And so the time passed rapidly. But, strange to say, there came no answer to those letters. O'Reilly chafed: he cursed the revolution which had made communication so uncertain; at length he cabled, but still the days dragged on with no result. Gradually his impatience gave way to apprehension. Unreasonable conjectures besieged his mind and destroyed his peace.

Great was his relief, therefore, when one day a worn, stained envelope addressed in Rosa's hand was laid upon his desk. The American stamp, the Key West postmark, looked strange, but— Her first letter! O'Reilly won-

dered if his first letter to her could possibly have moved her as this moved him. He kissed the envelope where her lips had caressed it in the sealing. Then with eager fingers he broke it open.

It was a generous epistle, long and closely written, but as he read his keen delight turned to dismay, and when he had turned the last thin page his brain was in wildest turmoil. He thought he must be dreaming. He turned sick, aching eyes upon his surroundings to prove this thing a nightmare, but the prosaic clink of a typewriter and the drone of a voice dictating quotations on Brazilian coffee were conclusive evidence to the contrary. Those pages between his thumb and finger were real. Yes, and that was Rosa's writing. Could it be that he had misunderstood anything? He turned to the beginning and attempted to read, but his hands shook so that he was obliged to lay the letter flat upon his desk.

Rosa's Spanish training had been severely tried. The stiff, quaint formality of her opening paragraphs only served to emphasize her final frightened cry for help.

My Dearly Beloved,—It is with diffidence and hesitation that I take my pen in hand, for I fear you may consider me unduly forward in writing to you without solicitation. Believe me, I appreciate the reserve which a young lady of refinement should practise even in her correspondence with the gentleman who has honored her with his promise of marriage, but my circumstances are such as to banish consideration of the social niceties.

Alas! What events have followed your departure from Matanzas! What misfortunes have overtaken Estéban and me. That happiness could be so swiftly succeeded by misery, that want could follow plenty, that peril could tread so closely upon the heels of safety! Where to begin, how to tell you, I scarcely know; my hand shakes, my eyes are blinded—nor dare I trust myself to believe that this letter will ever reach you, for we are refugees, Estéban and I—fugitives, outcasts, living in the manigua with Asensio and Evangelina, former slaves of our father. Such poverty, such indescribable circumstances! But

they were our only friends and they took us in when we were homeless, so we love them.

I see you stare at these words. I hear you say, "That Rosa has gone mad, like her wicked stepmother!" Indeed, sometimes I think I have. But, no. I write facts. It is a relief to put them down, even though you never read them. Good Asensio will take this letter on his horse to the Insurrecto camp, many miles away, and there give it to Colonel Lopez, our only friend, who promises that in some mysterious way it will escape the eyes of our enemies and reach your country. Yes, we have enemies! We, who have harmed no one. Wait until I tell you.

But if this letter reaches you—and I send it with a prayer—what then? I dare not think too long of that, for the hearts of men are not like the hearts of women. What will you say when you learn that the Rosa Varona whom you favored with your admiration is not the Rosa of to-day? I hear you murmur, "The girl forgets herself!" But, oh, the standards of yesterday are gone and my reserve is gone, too! I am a hunted creature.

O'Reilly felt a great pain in his breast at the thought that Rosa had for an instant doubted him. But she did not really doubt; those misgivings were but momentary; the abandon of her appeal showed that in her heart of hearts she knew his love to be unshakable.

She had compelled herself to start with the death of Doña Isabel and to give him a succinct account of all that had followed. O'Reilly read the story, fascinated. Here, amid these surroundings, with the rattle of typewriters and the tinkle of telephone-bells in his ears, it all seemed wholly improbable, fancifully unreal—like the workings of some turgid melodrama.

That is how we came to live with Asensio and his wife [the letter went on]. Imagine it! A bohio, hidden away far up the Yumuri, and so insignificant as to escape attention. We are no longer people of consequence or authority; our safety depends upon our inconspicuousness. We hide as do the timid animals, though nature has not given us their skill in avoiding danger. I do not like the wilderness; it frightens me. At night I hear

things rustling through the thatch above my head; in the morning my feet touch a bare earthen floor. We live on fruits and vegetables from Evangelina's garden, with now and then a fowl or a bite of meat when Asensio is fortunate. Estéban does not seem to mind, but I cannot accommodate myself to these barbarous surroundings. Sometimes I bite my tongue to keep from complaining, for that, I know, would grieve him.

The whole country is in chaos. There is no work—nothing but suspicion, hatred, and violence. Oh, what desolation this war has wrought! Estéban has already become a guerrillero. He has stolen a cow, and so we have milk for our coffee; but there is only a handful of coffee left, and little hope of more. Marauding bands of Spaniards are everywhere, and the country people tell atrocious tales about them. How will it end? How long before they will discover us and the worst will happen?

Soon after our arrival Estéban went to the camp of Colonel Lopez to arrange for us to join his army, but returned heartbroken. It was impossible, it seems, on my account. Conditions with the patriots are worse than with us here, and the colonel acknowledged frankly that he could not be burdened with a woman in his command. So Estéban has given up for the present his dream of fighting, and devotes himself to protecting me. You see there is no sanctuary, no help but his right arm. The towns are in Spanish hands, the manigua is infested with lawless men, and there is no place in which to hide me. So I feel myself a burden. Estéban has plans to arm a band of his own. I am numb with dread of what it may lead to, for his hatred is centered upon Cueto, that false servant whose wickedness reduced us to this extremity. Estéban is so young and reckless. If only you were here to counsel him.

If only you were here— Oh, my dearest Juan! If only you were here—to take me in your arms and banish this ever constant terror at my heart. If only you were here to tell me that you love me still in spite of my misfortune. See! The tears are falling as I write. My eyes are dim, my fingers trace uncertain letters on the sheet, and I can only steady them when I remember that you promised to return. You *will* return, will you not? I could not write like this if I were sure that you would read these lines. My nightly prayer— But I will not

tell you of my prayers, for fate may guide this letter to you, after all, and the hearts of men do change. In those dark hours when my doubts arise I try to tell myself that you will surely come and search me out.

Sometimes I play a game with Evangelina—our only game. We gather wild flowers. We assort the few belongings that I managed to bring with me and I array myself for you. And then I smile and laugh for a little while, and she tells me I am beautiful enough to please you. But the flowers fade, and I know that beauty, too, will fade in such surroundings. What then? I ask myself.

When you return to Cuba—see, my faith is strong again—avoid Matanzas, for your own sake and mine. Don Mario wanted to marry me to save me this exile. But I refused; I told him I was pledged to you, and he was furious. He is powerful; he would balk you, and there is always room for one more in San Severino. Pancho Cueto, too, living in luxury upon the fruits of his crime, would certainly consider you a menace to his security. You see how cunning my love for you has made me?

If I could come to you, I would, but I am marked. So if you still desire me you must search me out. You will? I pin my faith to that as to the Cross. To doubt would be to perish. If we should have to find another hiding-place, and that is always likely, you can learn of our whereabouts from Colonel Lopez.

Alas! If you had asked me to go with you that day! I would have followed you, for my heart beat then as it beats today, for you alone.

The candle is burning low and it will soon be daylight, and then this letter must begin its long, uncertain journey. I must creep into my bed now, to pray and then to dream. It is cold, before the dawn, and the thatch above me rustles. I am very poor and sad and lonely, O'Reilly, but my cheeks are full and red; my lips could learn to smile again, and you would not be ashamed of me.

Asensio is rising. He goes to find his horse and I must close. God grant this reaches you, some time, somehow. I trust the many blots upon the paper will not give you a wrong impression

of my writing, for I am neat, and I write nicely; only now the ink is poor and there is very little of it. There is little of anything, here at Asensio's house, except tears. Of those I fear there are too many to please you, my Juan, for men do not like tears. Therefore I try to smile as I sign myself,

Your loving and your faithful

ROSA.

O God! Come quickly, if you love me.

VI

THE QUEST BEGINS

WHEN O'Reilly had finished his second reading of the letter there were fresh blots upon the pitifully untidy pages. "I write nicely, only the ink is poor—" "There is little of anything here at Asensio's house—" "It is cold before the dawn—" . . . Poor little Rosa! He had always thought of her as so proud, so high-spirited, so playful, but another Rosa had written this letter. Her appeal stirred every chord of tenderness, every impulse of chivalry in his impressionable Irish nature. She doubted him; she feared he would not come to her. Well, he would set her doubts at rest. "O God! Come quickly, if you love me." He leaped to his feet; he dashed the tears from his eyes.

Mr. Slack looked up astonished at the apparition which burst in upon him. He was accustomed to O'Reilly's high head of steam and disapproved of it, but he had never seen the fellow so surcharged as now. He was positively jumpy; his voice was sharp; his hands were unsteady; his eyes were bright and blue and hard.

"I want my salary, quick," Johnnie began.

Mr. Slack resented emotion, he abominated haste; he had cultivated what he considered to be a thorough commercial deliberation.

"My dear man," he said, "I'd advise you—"

"I don't want advice; I want money," snapped the other. "I've quit, resigned, skipped, fled."

"Indeed? When does your resignation take effect?"

"Immediately, and if you don't move like lightning it will take effect upon your person."

"Mr. Carter would never—"

"Bother Mr. Carter! Now stiffen your spine long enough to write my check. If you don't—" O'Reilly compressed his lips and breathed ominously through his nostrils. He laid a heavy and persuasive hand upon the secretary's shoulder. "Hump yourself, old jellyfish!"

There was a queer, wild light in O'Reilly's eye and for once Mr. Slack took orders from an underling. He humped himself.

Johnnie's other preparations were conducted with equal vigor and promptitude; within two hours his belongings were packed. But for all his haste his mind was working clearly. Rosa's warning not to come to Matanzas was no doubt warranted, and his own unpleasant experiences with the customs men at Havana were still fresh enough to be vivid. The Spaniards were intensely suspicious of all Americans, especially incoming ones, as he had reason to know, and since he was nearly as well acquainted in the one place as in the other it seemed to be the part of wisdom to slip into the country through a side door. The seat of war was in the east. The rebels held that part of the island. Once there and in touch with them it would surely be no difficult task to evade the local authorities and join Colonel Lopez.

O'Reilly pondered these thoughts briefly, then seized his hat and hastened down-town to the office of the Cuban Junta.

At this time the newspapers of the United States were devoting much space to the insular uprising; the first stories of Spanish atrocities later, alas! destined to become all too familiar, were gaining public attention, and there were few readers who did not know something about the activities of that body of patriots who made their head-

quarters at 56 New Street. It was from this place that the revolution was largely financed, so the papers said. It was there that the filibustering expeditions supplying arms and ammunition originated. To 56 New Street O'Reilly went.

There was nothing martial about the atmosphere of the Junta's offices; there were no war maps on the walls, no stands of arms nor recruiting officers in evidence—not even a hint of intrigue or conspiracy. The place was rather meanly furnished, and it was disappointingly commonplace. A business-like young man inquired O'Reilly's errand.

Johnnie made known a part of it, and then asked to see some one in authority. In consequence, perhaps, of his Irish smile or of that persuasiveness which he could render almost irresistible when he willed, it was not long before he gained admittance to the presence of Mr. Enriquez, a distinguished, scholarly Cuban of middle age.

"You say you have important business with me?" the latter inquired, speaking with an accent of refinement.

O'Reilly plunged boldly into the heart of the matter which had brought him thither. When he had finished his tale Mr. Enriquez inquired:

"But how do you expect me to help you?"

"I want your advice more than your help, although you might tell me where I can find Colonel Lopez."

Enriquez eyed his caller keenly. "That information would be very well worth having," said he. "But, you understand, we know little about what is going on in Cuba—far less than the Spaniards themselves. I'm afraid I can't help you."

"You don't take me for a spy, do you?" Johnnie asked, with his friendly grin.

"Ah! You don't look like one, but we never know whom to trust. This young lady in whom you are interested, who is she?"

"Her name is Varona; Miss Rosa Varona."

"So?" Enriquez raised his brows. "Not by any chance the heiress to that famous Varona treasure?"

"Exactly!—if there is such a thing." There ensued a pause while the Cuban drummed softly upon his desk with his finger-tips. "Her brother Estéban told me that he was working for your cause. I warned him to be careful, but—" O'Reilly's voice grew suddenly husky. "Here! Read this. I want you to believe me." Reverently he laid Rosa's letter before her countryman. "I'm not in the habit of showing my letters to strangers, but—I guess that 'll convince you I'm not a spy."

He sat silently while the letter was being read; nor was he disappointed in the result. Mr. Enriquez raised dark, compassionate eyes to his, saying:

"This is a touching letter, sir. I thank you for allowing me to see it. No, I don't doubt you now. Poor Cuba! Her sons must be brave, her daughters patient."

"Well! You understand why I must go quickly, and why I can't chance delay by going either to Matanzas or to Havana. I want to land somewhere farther east, and I want you to help me to find Colonel Lopez."

Mr. Enriquez frowned thoughtfully. "What I just told you is literally true," he said at last. "We work in the dark up here, and we don't know the whereabouts of our troops. We are suspicious of strangers, too, as we have reason to be. But—I have a thought." He excused himself and left the room. When he returned he explained: "I don't have to tell you that we are watched all the time, and that for us to assist you openly would be liable to defeat your purpose. But I have just telephoned to a man I can trust, and I have told him your story. He has relatives in Cuba and he agrees to help you if he can. His name is Alvarado." Writing an address upon a card, he handed it to O'Reilly. "Go to him, tell him what you have told me, and do as he directs.

Another thing, don't return here unless it is necessary; otherwise when you land in Cuba you may have cause to regret it." Mr. Enriquez extended his hand, and when O'Reilly tried to thank him he shook his head. "It is nothing. I wish you success, but—I fear you have tackled a big proposition."

Dr. Alvarado, a high type of the Cuban professional man, was expecting O'Reilly. He listened patiently to his caller's somewhat breathless recital.

"You do well to avoid the cities where you are known," he agreed. "It would be madness, under the circumstances, even to be seen in Matanzas: those enemies of—your friends—would have you deported. But just how to reach the Insurrectos—"

"If you'd merely give me a letter saying I'm a friend—"

The doctor promptly negatived this suggestion. "Surely you don't think it can be done as easily as that?" he inquired. "In the first place, wherever you land, you will be watched and probably searched. Such a letter, if discovered, would not only end your chances, but it would bring certain disaster upon those to whom it was written. I have no right to jeopardize the lives of those I hold dear. These are perilous times for all good Cubans, Mr. O'Reilly. Enriquez told me about that poor girl. She bears a famous name and—I want to help her." He removed his glasses and wiped them, absent-mindedly. "There are three Alvarados living," he resumed. "My two brothers, Tómas and Ignacio, reside in Cuba, and we all work for the cause of independence in our own ways. I am fortunately situated, but they are surrounded by dangers, and I must ask you to be extremely careful in communicating with them, for I am placing their lives in your hands and—I love them dearly."

"I shall do exactly as you say."

"Very well, then! Go to Neuvitas, where Tómas lives—there is a steamer leaving in three or four days, and

you can arrange passage on her. He is a dentist. Meet him, somehow, and make yourself known by repeating this sentence: 'I come from Felipe. He told me how you whipped him to keep him from going to the Ten Years' War!' That will be enough; he will ask you who you are and what you want."

"I see. It's a sort of password."

"No. I've never had reason to communicate with him in this way." Noting the bewilderment in O'Reilly's face, Alvarado smiled. "You won't need to say anything more. No living soul, except Tómas and I, knows that he thrashed me, but it is true. I was young, I wanted to go to the war, but he took it out of me with a bamboo. Later we bound ourselves never to mention it. He will understand from the message that I trust you, and he will help you to reach the rebels, if such a thing is possible. But tell me, when you have found Miss Varona, what then?"

"Why, I'll bring her out."

"How? Do you think you can walk into any seaport and take ship? You will be tagged and numbered by the authorities. Once you disappear into the manigua, you will be a marked man."

"Well, then, I'll marry her right there. I'm an American citizen—"

"Don't build too much on that fact, either," the doctor warned. "Spanish jails are strong, and your country has never compelled that respect for its nationals which other countries insist upon."

"Perhaps! But the first thing is to find Miss Varona and learn that she's safe. I don't much care what happens after that."

Alvarado nodded and smiled. "Good! What would this world be without sentiment? It loves a lover. I like your spirit and I hope soon to have the pleasure of again seeing you and meeting your—wife."

O'Reilly flushed and stammered, whereupon the good Cuban patted him on the shoulder. "Come and see me when you get back, and bring me news of Tómas. Now, adios, compadre."

"Adios, señor! I am deeply grateful!"

O'Reilly had no difficulty in securing passage direct to Neuvitas on the English steamer *Dunham Castle*, and a few days later he saw the Atlantic Highlands dissolve into the mists of a winter afternoon as the ship headed outward into a nasty running sea.

It proved to be a wretched trip. Off Hatteras the *Dunham Castle* labored heavily for twelve hours, and bad weather followed her clear into the old Bahama Channel. Not until she had thrust her nose into the narrow entrance of Neuvitas harbor did she wholly cease her seasick plunging, but then the weather changed with bewildering suddenness.

Cuba, when it came fairly into sight, lay bathed in golden sunshine, all warmth and welcome, like a bride upon an azure couch. The moist breath from her fragrant shores swept over the steamer's decks and Johnnie O'Reilly sniffed it joyfully.

He had brought little luggage with him, only an extra suit of khaki, a few toilet articles, and a Colt's revolver, the companion of his earlier Cuban days. He was holding the weapon in his hand, debating how and where to conceal it, when the first officer paused in the state-room door and, spying it, exclaimed:

"Hello! Smuggling arms to the Insurrectos, eh?"

O'Reilly laughed. "It's an old friend. I don't know just what to do with it."

"I'll tell you," the mate volunteered. "Lead your old friend out here to the rail, shake hands with him, and drop him overboard before he gets you into trouble."

"Really?"

"I mean it. They won't let you land with that hardware. Take my tip."

But Johnnie hesitated. Though his intentions were far from warlike, he could not bring himself, in view of his secret plans, to part with his only weapon. He examined his extra pair of khaki trousers, and discovering a considerable surplus of cloth at each inside seam, he took needle and thread and managed to sew the gun in so that it hung close against the inside of his right leg when he donned the garment. It felt queer and uncomfortable, but it did not appear to be noticeable so long as he stood upright. With some pride in his stratagem, he laid off his winter suit and changed into lighter clothing.

Neuvitas was scorching under a midday sun when he came on deck. Its low, square houses were glaring white; here and there a splotch of vivid Cuban blue stood out; the rickety, worm-eaten piling of its water-front resembled rows of rotten, snaggly teeth smiling out of a chalky face mottled with unhealthy, artificial spots of color. Gusts of wind from the shore brought feverish odors, as if the city were sick and exhaled a tainted breath. But beyond, the hills were clean and green, the fields were rich and ripe. That was the Cuba which O'Reilly knew.

A Spanish transport, close by, was languidly discharging uniformed troops; lighters of military supplies were being unloaded; the sound of a bugle floated from the shore. Moored to the docks or anchored in the harbor were several shallow-draught "tin-clad" coast-patrol craft from the staffs of which streamed the red and yellow bars of Spain.

Although there were but a few passengers on the *Dunham Castle*, they were subjected to a long delay during which suspicious customs men searched their baggage and questioned them. Finally, however, O'Reilly found himself free to go ashore. He had passed the ordeal handily, and now he was eager to reach some lodging-place where he could remove that revolver which knocked against his

leg so awkwardly at every step. Once on the dock, he gave his bag to a negro and led the way toward the street. At the last moment, however, just as he was about to plant his feet upon solid earth, he was halted by two men who rose from a bench where they had been idling. They carried the tasseled canes of the Secret Service, and O'Reilly felt his heart jump.

With a murmured apology one of them relieved the negro of the valise while the other began to search O'Reilly's person for concealed weapons. He began at Johnnie's shoulders and patted one pocket after another, "fanning" him in the fashion approved of policemen. Now, too late, the American regretted his refusal to heed the mate's warning. It seemed certain that he was in for trouble, but he drew his heels together and stood with the revolver pressed between his legs, praying that those exploratory palms would not encounter it. When the officer had slapped every pocket, ending at the hips, he nodded; his companion snapped shut the valise, and handed it back to the porter.

O'Reilly paused a moment or two later to wipe the abundant perspiration from his face; even yet his pulse was pounding erratically. He hoped the future held no more surprises of this sort, for he feared that his nerve might fail him.

El Gran Hotel Europea, Neuvitas's leading hostelry, belied its name. It was far from large, and certainly it was anything but European, except, perhaps, in its proprietor's extravagant and un-American desire to please, at any cost. The building was old and dirty, the open café, fronting upon the sidewalk of the main street, was full of flies, and dust from the unclean roadway lay thick upon its stone-topped tables; moreover, a recognizable odor of decay issued from the patio—or perhaps from the kitchen behind it. After O'Reilly's first meal he was sure it came from the latter place; even suspected that the odor

flattered actual conditions. But it was the best hotel the place afforded, and Señor Carbajal was the most attentive of hosts.

He was a globular, unctuous little man, this Carbajal; he reminded O'Reilly of a drop of oil. He evinced an unusual interest in the affairs of his American guest, and soon developed a habit of popping into the latter's room at unexpected moments, ostensibly to see that all was as it should be. Now there was very little in the room to need attention—only a bed with a cheese-cloth mosquito-net, a wash-stand, and a towering, smelly clothes-press of Spanish architecture, which looked as if it might have a dark and sinister history. When, for the third time, he appeared without knocking, O'Reilly suspected something.

"You have everything, eh?" Mr. Carbajal teetered upon the balls of his feet while his small black eyes roved inquisitively.

"Everything in abundance."

"There is water, eh?" The proprietor peered dutifully into the pitcher, incidentally taking stock of O'Reilly's toilet articles.

"A veritable ocean of it."

"One never knows. These servants are so lazy. But—your other baggage, your trunk?"

"I have no trunk."

"So? I took you to be a great traveler."

"I am."

"Selling goods, eh?"

"No."

"Indeed? Then you are a pleasure traveler? You see the sights, is that it? Well, Cuba is beautiful."

"Most beautiful, judging from what I have seen."

Mr. Carbajal wagged a pudgy forefinger at his guest. "Tut! Tut! You know Cuba. You speak the language better than a native. You can't fool me, sly one!" He

wrinkled his face and winked both eyes. It was an invitation to further confidence, and he was disappointed when it passed unnoticed. "Well, you Americans are a brave people," he continued, with an obvious effort to keep the conversation going. "You like to be where the fighting is."

"Not I. I'm a timid man."

"Ho! Ha! Ha!" the proprietor cackled. Then he became pensive. "There is nothing here at Neuvitas to interest a tourist—except the war."

"I'm not a tourist."

"Indeed? Now that is interesting." Mr. Carbajal seated himself on the edge of the bed, where he could look into O'Reilly's traveling-bag. "Not a tourist, not a traveling-man. Now what could possibly bring you to Cuba?"

O'Reilly eyed his inquisitor gravely; a subtle melancholy darkened his agreeable countenance. "I travel for my health," said he.

"You— Health—!" Carbajal's frame began to heave; his bulging abdomen oscillated as if shaken by some hidden hand. "Good! Ha! There's another joke for you."

"I'm a sick man," O'Reilly insisted, hollowly.

"From what malady do you suffer?" inquired the hotelkeeper.

"Rheumatism."

"Rheumatism? That is no more than a pain in the joints, a stiffness—"

"There! I knew it!" O'Reilly exclaimed in triumph. Rising, he seized his host's moist hands and shook them violently. "You give me courage! You make a new man of me. These doctors enjoy a fellow's agony; they'd like to bury him. They'd never recommend this climate. No! 'Pain in the joints,' you say, 'stiffness.' That proves the abominable affliction is practically unknown here. I thank you, sir."

"You don't look sick," mumbled Carbajal. "Not like the other American."

"What other American?"

"A peculiar fellow. He went on to Puerto Principe. What a cough! And he was as thin as a wire. He bled at the mouth, too, all the time, when he was not reviling my hotel. You'll see him if you go there, provided he hasn't come apart with his coughing. I believe he writes for newspapers. Well, it is my pleasure to serve you. Command me at any hour." Mr. Carbajal rose reluctantly and went wheezing down-stairs to his grimy tables and the flies.

O'Reilly was not in the least deceived; it was plain to him that the hotel man was in close touch with the Spanish authorities, and he began to feel the need of some better excuse, some valid business reason, for being here, such as would allay suspicion once for all. But he could think of nothing better than his rheumatism, and to that he determined to cling.

VII

THE MAN WHO WOULD KNOW LIFE

LATER that day O'Reilly set out to reconnoiter the city of Neuvitas. He was followed, of course—he had expected as much, and the circumstances amused rather than alarmed him. But when he returned to his hotel and found that his room had been visited during his absence he felt a hint of uneasiness. Evidently, as Doctor Alvarado had forecast, the authorities were interested in him; and he had further evidence of the fact when he learned that the room next him was occupied by the very man who had shadowed him on the street. Inasmuch as the intervening wall was no more than a thin partition, through which his very breathing could be heard, while his every movement could doubtless be spied upon, O'Reilly saw the need of caution, and he began to cast about for a place to hide that Colt's revolver, the presence of which was assuming the proportions of a menace. Now that his belongings had been examined three times that day, the next step would probably be another search of his person. Unless in the mean time he could definitely establish his innocence of purpose, which was unlikely, it behooved him to rid himself of the weapon without delay. This, however, was a problem. He could not bring himself to throw the thing away, and his bare bedroom offered no place of concealment. Late that evening he called Mr. Carbajal and asked him if it were possible to take a bath.

Mr. Carbajal assured him that it was. *El Gran Hotel Europea* was first class in every respect; no expense had been spared in its equipment. Señor O'Rail-ye had indeed done well in patronizing it, for it boasted the best *cuarto de baño* in the whole city—a room, moreover, which was devoted exclusively to the purposes of bathing. And it was a large room—large enough to accommodate a dozen guests at once. To be sure, it would require, say, half an hour to make it ready, for it was stored with hay for the horses which drew the 'bus to and from the depot, but if the señor would have patience it could soon be restored to its original purpose. Mr. Carbajal himself would see that there was a river of hot water.

O'Reilly thanked him. An hour later he paraded, barefoot, down the hall, wrapped in a blanket. He had purposely left his clothes behind him, and the door of his room unlocked, but under his naked left arm he carried the revolver.

He was a long time in his bath. When he returned to his chamber he found his garments very nearly as he had left them. He smiled as he crept into bed and tucked the netting under his thin mattress. They could search him now, whenever they pleased, for the revolver and its box of precious cartridges reposed on a duty beam over the bathroom, where no one would ever think of looking.

During breakfast, and afterward throughout an aimless morning stroll, O'Reilly felt watchful eyes upon him. When he returned to his hotel he found Mr. Carbajal in the café concocting *refrescos* for some military officers, who scanned the American with bold, hostile glances. O'Reilly complained to the proprietor of a toothache.

At once Mr. Carbajal was sympathetic; he was also admonitory, blaming the affliction upon that bath of the previous evening. Excessive bathing, he declared, was injurious, particularly in the winter season; it opened

one's pores, and it dried one's skin and rendered one liable to the attacks of every disease. Heat? Perspiration? Was it wise to resort to unnatural and artificial means in order to rid oneself of a trifling annoyance? If perspiration were injurious, nature would not have provided it. In fact, it was nature's method of keeping the body clean, and if people were unreasonably fastidious about such things a little cologne would render them even more agreeable to the senses than any number of baths. That was the purpose of cologne. This habit of bathing at fixed intervals of a week or two, regardless of conditions, might be, and probably was, responsible for all of O'Reilly's rheumatism. Mr. Carbajal, for one, knew better than to overdo the thing. He had never suffered an ache or a pain in his life and his teeth were perfectly sound, as he demonstrated by beating vigorously upon them with his mixing-spoon.

O'Reilly was impressed by this argument, he acknowledged, but unfortunately it did not remedy the pain which was killing him. During the hottest part of the day, when he knew the town would be asleep, he reappeared in the café, his cheek in his hand. He declared that something had to be done, at once, and inquired the name and address of the best local dentist.

Mr. Carbajal named several, among them Dr. Tómas Alvarado, whereupon his guest hurried away, followed at a respectful distance by the secret agent.

Finding Doctor Alvarado's office was closed, as he had anticipated, O'Reilly proceeded to the doctor's residence. There was some delay when he rang the bell, but eventually the dentist himself appeared. O'Reilly recognized him from his resemblance to his brother. He addressed him in English.

"I come from Felipe," he began. "He well remembers the day you whipped him to keep him from going to the Ten Years' War."

The languor of Doctor Alvarado's siesta vanished. He started, his eyes widened.

"Who are you?" he muttered.

"My name is O'Reilly. I am an American, a friend, so don't be alarmed. The man you see approaching is following me, but he thinks I have come to you with a toothache."

"What do you want?"

"I want your help in joining the Insurrectos."

By this time the detective had come within earshot. Making an effort at self-possession, the dentist said: "Very well. I will meet you at my office in a half-hour and see what can be done." Then he bowed.

O'Reilly raised his hat and turned away.

Doctor Alvarado's dentist's chair faced a full-length window, one of several which, after the Cuban fashion, opened directly upon the sidewalk, rendering both the waiting-room and the office almost as public as the street itself. Every one of these windows was wide open when Johnnie arrived; but it seemed that the dentist knew what he was about, for when his patient had taken his seat and he had begun an examination of the troublesome tooth, he said, under his breath:

"I, too, am watched. Talk to me in English. When I press, thus, upon your gum, you will know that some one is passing. Now then, what is the meaning of your amazing message from Felipe?"

While Doctor Alvarado pretended to treat a perfectly sound molar, Johnnie managed, despite frequent interruptions, to make known the reason and circumstances of his presence.

"But there are no rebels around here," Alvarado told him. "You could escape to the country, perhaps, but what then? Where would you go? How would they know who you are?"

"That's what I want to find out."

The Cuban pondered. "You'll have to go to Puerto Principe," he said, at length. "Our men are operating in that neighborhood, and my brother Ignacio will know how to reach them. I'll give you a message to him, similar to the one you brought me from Felipe." Then he smiled. "I've just thought of the very thing. Years ago I lent him a book which I particularly prized, and one of his children damaged it. I was furious. I declared I would never lend him another, and I never have. Now then, I'll give you that very volume; hand it to him and say that I asked you to return it to him. I'd like to see his face when he receives it."

O'Reilly thanked him, promising to use every precaution in delivering the message. The very care necessary in communicating between brother and brother made him realize more clearly than hitherto that he was among enemies.

The next morning he paid Carbajal's score and took the train to the interior. In his bag was Tómas Alvarado's precious volume, and in the same coach with him rode the Secret Service man.

In its general features Puerto Principe differed little from the other Cuban cities O'Reilly knew. It was compactly built, it was very old and it looked its centuries. Its streets were particularly narrow and crooked, having been purposely laid out in labyrinthian mazes, so the story goes, in order to fool the pirates. In some ways it was quaint and unusual. For instance, here and there were queer *tinajones*, vast venerable earthen jars for holding rain-water, each inscribed with the date when it left the potter's wheel; then, too, there was a remarkable number of churches—massive structures, grayed by time—and in the northern distance, blue against the sky, O'Reilly had a glimpse of the Cubitas range, where he knew the Insurrectos were in camp. That was his goal: it seemed almost within his grasp. He was tempted to abandon

caution and make a dash for it, until he discovered that the city was well guarded. One needed a pass to enter or to leave Puerto Principe, and, moreover, the city had no suburbs, no scattered residences outside its boundaries: when one came to the end of a street one found oneself in an open field faced by a barbed-wire barrier, and on every road leading from the town stood a *fortina*, a little fort of brick or logs, in which were stationed Spanish soldiers. The streets were alive with uniformed men, patrols were everywhere, and martial law prevailed. For the first time O'Reilly began to perceive the strength of that mailed hand which held the island so tightly. Judging from the preparations here, one must conclude that Spain had no intention of relinquishing her last New World possession.

After a stroll through the city, during which he carefully used his eyes, Johnnie asked himself how the ill-drilled, ill-equipped, loosely organized Insurrectos could hope to overthrow so solid a power as this, backed as it seemed to be by unlimited means and unlimited armies of trained troops. It looked like a hopeless undertaking. No seaport, no city, scarcely a hamlet, in fact, so far as O'Reilly knew, was held by the rebels; they lurked in the woods or rode the savannas in ragged bands, here to-day, there to-morrow. To aid or comfort them was treason. They appeared out of the jungles at unexpected moments; they faded like the mists of the dawn. Theirs was an apparitional warfare, and even their biggest victories were signals for retreat. How could they think to win?

It seemed impossible that such resistance as they offered could wear down and conquer the resources of Spain, yet the very numbers and alertness of the Spanish troops argued a somewhat formidable opposition. Did it not also argue an all-pervading restlessness which might some day escape control? O'Reilly, of course, had no part in this quarrel: but it struck him as a wicked waste

to destroy, to ravage, and to slay when settlement was so easy. The motive behind this prodigal extravagance of blood and gold was nothing but foolish resistance of a principle. A little yielding, a little diminution of harshness, a little compassion on the part of the mother country, and these men who were killing one another would embrace and proclaim their blood brotherhood.

Pondering such thoughts as these, O'Reilly returned to his hotel. As he sat in the café, sipping an orangeade, he heard some one speaking in atrocious Spanish, and looked up to see that another American had entered. The stranger was a tall, funereal young man, with pallid cheeks and hollow, burning eyes: he was asking for ice-water, but what he said resembled anything except the language of the country.

"Hey, George!" he cried. "Try gimme a vasso of agwa con yellow." He pronounced the words with elaborate pains. "Make it a long one."

A waiter eyed him tolerantly, but with no faintest sign of understanding.

"Agwa con yellow—agwa with ice. *Ice!* ICE!" the man repeated loudly. Still failing of a response, he shouted, "Don't you know what 'ice' is?" He wrapped his long, lean arms about himself and shivered. "Cold! Icie! Freezum! Br-r-r! Savvy?"

Inspiration came to the waiter; a smile irradiated his countenance, and with a murmured apology for his stupidity he hurried away.

O'Reilly stepped over to the stranger's table and introduced himself. "The hotel-keeper in Neuvitas told me I'd find you here," he said. "Your name is—"

"Branch; Leslie Branch. So Carbajal said you'd find me here, eh? Oh, the greasy little liar. He didn't believe it. He thought his cooking would have killed me, long ago, and it nearly did." This time Mr. Branch's bony frame underwent a genuine shudder and his face

was convulsed with loathing. "Did you try his butter? 'Made in Denmark' during the early Victorian period. I hate antiques—can't eat anything oily. Carbajal's in the Secret Service. Nice fat little spy."

"So I suspected."

Mr. Branch's beverage appeared at this moment. With a flourish the waiter placed a small glass and a bottle of dark liquid before him. Branch stared at it, then rolled a fiercely smoldering eye upward.

"What's that?" he inquired.

O'Reilly read the label. "It's bitters," said he.

"*Bitters!* And I asked for 'yellow'—a glass of agwa with yellow." Branch's voice shook. "I'm dying of a fever, and this ivory-billed toucan brings me a quart of poison. Bullets!" It was impossible to describe the suggestion of profanity with which the speaker colored this innocuous expletive. "Weak as I am, I shall gnaw his windpipe." He bared his teeth suggestively and raised two talon-like hands.

The waiter was puzzled, but not alarmed. He embraced himself as his customer had done, and shuddered; then pointing at the bitters, he nodded encouragingly.

O'Reilly forestalled an outburst by translating his countryman's wants. "Un vaso de agua con hielo," said he, and the attendant was all apologies.

"So, you speak the lingo?" marveled Mr. Branch. "Well, I can't get the hang of it. Don't like it. Don't like anything Spanish. Hell of a country, isn't it? where the ice is '*yellow*' and the butter is '*meant to kill you*,' and does."

O'Reilly laughed. "You've been studying a guidebook, 'with complete glossary of Spanish phrases.' By the way, Carbajal said you are a writer."

Mr. Branch nodded listlessly. "I'm supposed to report this insurrection, but the Spaniards won't let me.

They edit my stuff to suit themselves. I'm getting tired of the farce."

"Going home?"

"Don't dare." The speaker tapped his concave chest. "Bum lungs. I came down here to shuffle off, and I'm waiting for it to happen. What brings you to Cuba?"

"I'm here for my health, too." The real invalid stared. "I have rheumatism."

"Going to sweat it out, eh? Well, there's nothing to do but sweat"—Branch was racked by a coughing spasm that shook his reedy frame—"sweat and cough. Bullets! No mistake about that hospital bark, is there?" When he had regained his breath he said: "See here! I'm going to take a chance with you, for I like your looks. My newspaper work is a bluff: I don't send enough stuff to keep me alive. I come here to cure my lungs, and—I want you to help me do it."

O'Reilly stared at the man in surprise. "How can I help you?" he asked.

"By taking me with you."

"With me? Where?"

"To the Insurrectos, of course."

The men eyed each other fixedly. "What makes you think—" O'Reilly began.

"Oh, don't say it! I've got a hunch! I don't know what your game is—probably dynamite: there's a story that the rebels have sent for some American experts to teach them how to use the stuff, and God knows they need instruction! Anyhow, I can't swallow that rheumatism talk. I thought you might give me a lift. Take me along, will you?"

"And how would that benefit your cough?" Johnnie inquired, curiously.

Mr. Branch hesitated. "Well, I'll tell you," he said, after a moment. "I'm afraid to die this way, by inches, and hours. I'm scared to death." It seemed impossible

that the sick man's cheeks could further blanch, but they became fairly livid, while a beading of moisture appeared upon his upper lip. "God! You've no idea how it gets on a fellow's nerves to see himself slipping—slipping. I'd like to end it suddenly, like that!" He voiced the last sentence abruptly and snapped his fingers. "I've tried to bump off, but—no courage! Funny, isn't it? Well, the doctors told me another New York winter would put me in a rosewood show-case. I've tried Colorado and it's no good. See? So I decided to join the Cubans and—let a bullet do the trick. I never did like the Spaniards—their cooking is too greasy. Then, too, I'd like to have a thrill before I cash in—taste 'the salt of life,' as somebody expressed it. That's war. It's the biggest game in the world. What do you think of the idea?"

"Not much," O'Reilly said, honestly.

"Difference in temperament. I suppose it *is* a sick fancy, but I've got it. Unfortunately, now that I'm here, these Romeos won't let me get out of town. If you're what I think you are, give me a hand. I'm a rotten coward, but I'll fight if the Cubans will take me."

"Where are the Cubans?"

"Oh, they're out yonder in the hills. I know all about 'em. Come over to my quarters, and I'll show you a map, if you're interested."

"I am," said O'Reilly, and, rising, he followed his new acquaintance.

VIII

THE SPANISH DOUBLOON

ON the whole, Pancho Cueto's plans had worked smoothly. After denouncing the Varona twins as traitors he had managed to have himself appointed trustee for the crown, for all their properties, consummation for which he had worked from the moment he read that letter of Estéban's on the morning after Doña Isabel's death. To be sure, the overseer had acquired title, of a sort, to the plantation by paying the taxes over a period of years, but it was the *quinta* itself which he desired, the *Quinta de Estéban* with its hidden gold. That there was a treasure Cueto had never doubted, and, once the place was his to do with as he chose, he began his search.

Cueto was a tireless, thorough-going man, therefore he did not set about his explorations in the haphazard manner of Doña Isabel. Commencing at the lower edge of the grounds, he ripped them up with a series of deep trenches and cross-cuts. It was a task that required the labor of many men for several weeks, and when it was finished there was scarcely a growing thing left upon the place. Only a few of the larger trees remained. Cueto was disappointed at finding nothing, but he was not discouraged. Next he tore down the old slave barracoons and the outbuildings, after which he completely wrecked the residence itself. He pulled it apart bit by bit, brick by brick. He even dug up its foundations, but without the reward of so much as a single peseta. Finally, when

the villa was but a heap of rubbish and the grounds a scar upon the slope of La Cumbre, he desisted, baffled, incredulous, while all Matanzas laughed at him. Having sacrificed his choicest residence, he retired in chagrin to the plantation of La Joya.

But Cueto was now a man with a grievance. He burned with rage, and his contempt for the boy and girl he had wronged soured into hatred. Such time as he did not spend in racking his brain to explain the disappearance of the dead Estéban's riches, he devoted to cursing the living Estéban and his sister, who, it seemed to him, were somehow to blame for his wrecked hopes.

In time he began to realize also that so long as they lived they would jeopardize his tenure of their property. Public feeling, at present, was high; there was intense bitterness against all rebels; but the war would end some day. What then? Cueto asked himself. Sympathy was ever on the side of the weak and oppressed. There would come a day of reckoning.

As if to swell his discomfiture and strengthen his fears, out from the hills at the head of the Yumuri issued rumors of a little band of *guerrilleros*, under the leadership of a beardless boy—a band of blacks who were making the upper valley unsafe for Spanish scouting parties.

Cursing the name of Varona, Pancho Cueto armed himself. He did not venture far alone, and, like Doña Isabel before him, he began to have bad dreams at night.

One day a field of Cueto's cane was burned, and his laborers reported seeing Estéban and some negroes riding into the wood. The overseer took horse within the hour and rode pell-mell to Matanzas. In the city at this time was a certain Colonel Cobo, in command of Spanish Volunteers, those execrable convict troops from the Isle of Pines whose atrocities had already marked them as wolves rather than men, and to him Pancho went with his story.

"Ah yes! That Varona boy. I've heard of him," Cobo remarked, when his caller had finished his account. "He has reason to hate you, I dare say, for you robbed him." The Colonel smiled disagreeably. He was a disagreeable fellow, so dark of skin as to lend credence to the gossip regarding his parentage; a loud, strutting, domineering person, whose record in Santa Clara Province was such that only the men discussed it.

Cueto murmured something to the effect that the law had placed him in his position as trustee for the crown, and should therefore protect him; but Colonel Cobo's respect for the law, it seemed, was slight. In his view there was but one law in the land, the law of force.

"Why do you come to me?" he asked.

"That fellow is a desperado," Pancho declared. "He should be destroyed."

"Bah! The country is overrun with desperadoes of his kind, and worse. Burning crops is nothing new. I'd make an end of him soon enough, but nearly all of my men are in Cardenas. We have work enough to do."

"I'd make it worth while, if you could put an end to him," Pancho said, hesitatingly. Then, recalling some of those stories about Colonel Cobo, he added, "There are two of them, you know, a boy and a girl."

"Ah yes! I remember."

"I can direct you to the house of Asensio, where they live."

"Um-m!" Cobo was thoughtful. "A girl. How old is she?"

"Eighteen."

"Ugly as an alligator, I'll warrant."

"Ha! The most ravishing creature in all Matanzas. All the men were mad over her." Cueto's eyes gleamed craftily, for he believed he had measured Cobo's caliber. "She should have married old Castaño and all his money, but she was heart and soul in the revolution. She and

the boy were spying on us, you know, and sending the information to that rebel, Lopez."

"Lopez! Spies, were they?"

"The worst kind. You'd scarcely believe it of a beautiful girl, with her culture and refinement. I tell you it broke more than one heart. De Castaño, for instance, has never recovered. He sits all day in the Casino and grieves for her. Such hair and eyes, such skin—as white as milk—and flesh as pure as the petals of a flower. Well, you wouldn't believe such charms existed."

Colonel Cobo, the guerrilla, licked his full, red lips and ran a strong, square hand over his curly, short-cropped hair. "You say you know where she—where they are living?"

"Ah, perfectly! It's less than a night's ride. There's no one except the boy to reckon with."

"How much is he worth to you?" bluntly inquired the soldier, and Cueto sat down to make the best terms possible.

"Do you think he received my letter?" Rosa asked of her brother one evening as they sat on the board bench by Asensio's door. It was a familiar question to Estéban; he had answered it many times.

"Oh yes!" he declared. "Lopez's messenger got through to Key West."

"Then why doesn't he come?"

"But, my dear, you must be patient. Think of his difficulties."

The girl sighed. "I do. I think of nothing else. Sometimes I feel that he is here—I seem to feel his presence—then again the most terrible doubts assail me. You know there was another woman. Perhaps."

"What an idea!" Estéban exclaimed. "As if he could think of any one after knowing you. Did he not assure

you that he was going to New York for the sole purpose of breaking off that affair? Well, then!" This subject always distressed young Varona; therefore he changed it. "Come! You haven't heard of my good fortune. I captured another fine snake to-day, a big, sleepy fellow. Believe me, he'll wake up when I set fire to his tail. He'll go like the wind, and with every foot he goes away will go more of Pancho Cueto's profits."

"You intend to burn more of his fields?" absently inquired the girl.

"Every one of them. You should have seen those rats when we soaked them with oil and set them afire. They scampered fast; but their hair is short; they don't run far. These snakes will be better."

"It seems terrible to destroy our own property."

Estéban broke out excitedly; he could not discuss Pancho Cueto without losing control of himself. "Would you permit that traitor to fatten upon the profits of our plantations? He thinks he is safe; he is preparing for a rich crop at high prices, but he shall never reap a dollar from Varona land as long as I live. I shall ruin him, as he ruined us."

Rosa shook her dark head sadly. "And we are indeed ruined. Think of our beautiful house; all our beautiful things, too! We used to consider ourselves poor, but—how little we knew of real poverty. There are so many things I want. Have we nothing left?"

"I thought it best to buy those rifles," the brother murmured, dropping his eyes. "It was one chance in a million."

"No doubt it was. It seems those Spaniards will sell their souls."

"Exactly. We can dig food from the earth and pluck it from the trees, but good Mausers don't grow on every bush. Besides, of what use would money be to us when we have no place to spend it?"

"True!" After a moment Rosa mused aloud: "I wonder if Cueto found the treasure? If only we had that—"

"He didn't find it," Estéban declared, positively. "I"—he hesitated—"I think I know why he didn't."

"Yes?"

"I think I know where it is."

"*Estéban!*" Rosa stared, round-eyed, at her brother.

"Oh, I mean it. I've been thinking so ever since—"

"Where is it?" breathlessly inquired the girl.

After a furtive look over his shoulder Estéban whispered, "In the well."

"You're joking!"

"No, no! Think for yourself. It was old Sebastian who dug that well—"

"Yes."

"And he alone shared father's confidence. That sunken garden was all Sebastian's work; he spent all his time there, although he was a big, strong man and capable of any task. No one else was allowed to tend it. Why? I'll tell you. They feared to let any one else draw the water. Isabel searched for years: if that treasure had been above ground her sharp nose would have smelled it out, and now Cueto has moved the very earth."

Rosa sat back, disappointed. "So that's your theory?"

"It's more than a theory," the boy insisted. "Look at this!" From the pocket of his cotton trousers he produced an odd-looking coin which he placed in Rosa's hand.

"Why, it's gold! It's a Spanish doubloon," she said. "It's the first one I ever saw. Where did you find it?"

"You'll think I'm crazy when I tell you—sometimes I think so myself. I found it in Isabel's hand when I took her from the well!"

Rosa was stricken speechless.

"She clutched it tightly," Estéban hurried on, "but as I made the rope fast her hand relaxed and I saw it in the

lantern-light. It was as if—well, as if she gave it to me. I was too badly frightened to think much about it, as you may imagine. It was a horrible place, all slime and foul water; the rocks were slippery. But that coin was in her fingers."

Rosa managed to say: "Impossible! Then she must have had it when she fell."

"No, no! I saw her hands upstretched, her fingers open, in the moonlight."

"It's uncanny. Perhaps—"

"Yes. Perhaps some unseen hand led her to the place so that we should at last come into our own. Who knows? I didn't bother my head about the matter at first, what with our flight and all, but now I reason that there must be other coins where this one came from. There's no doubt that father hid his money. He turned his slaves into gold, he bought jewels, precious metal, anything he could hide. Well, perhaps there were old coins in the lot. The water in the well is shallow; Isabel must have groped this piece from the bottom. Some day I shall explore the hole and—we shall see."

Rosa flung her arms rapturously about her brother's neck and kissed him. "Wouldn't it be glorious?" she cried. "Wouldn't it be wonderful, to be rich, and to want for nothing; to have fine clothes and good things to eat once more? Good things to eat!" Her lip quivered. "Oh—I'm so hungry."

"Poor little girl!"

"Wait till O'Reilly hears about this." Rosa was all excitement once more. "He'll be glad he came and got me, if he does come."

Estéban caressed her. "He'll come, never fear. You remember he warned me to be careful? Well I—I blame myself for bringing you to this. For myself, of course I don't mind, but for you this life must be terrible. I know it. Every time I leave you my heart is in my throat for

fear of what may happen in my absence—and yet I can't always be at your side."

"There! You acknowledge that I handicap you. Except for me you would be making a glorious name for yourself."

"Nothing of the sort. More probably I'd be getting myself killed. No! It's better this way. We must be brave and patient and—think of what is waiting for us at the bottom of that well."

It was indeed a great piece of luck which had enabled Estéban Varona to buy a half-dozen Mausers from a Spanish soldier. Through Asensio's acquaintance he had profited by the dishonesty of an enemy, and, although it had taken all his money to effect the purchase, Estéban considered the sacrifice well worth while. The fire of patriotism burned fiercely in him, as did his hatred of Pancho Cueto, and the four trusty young negroes to whom he had given rifles made, with Asensio and himself, an armed party large enough to be reckoned with. These blacks were excitable fellows, and wretched marksmen, but, on the other hand, each and every one had been raised with a machete at his hip and knew how to use it. After a few preliminary forays under Estéban's leadership they had absorbed a bit of discipline and were beginning to feel a military ardor.

In the Cuban field forces there were many negroes, and many of their fellow-patriots fought better, or endured the hardships of guerrilla warfare more cheerfully, than they. Gen. Antonio Maceo was of mixed blood, and yet his leadership was characterized not only by rare judgment and ability, but also by an exalted abandon of personal bravery. His several brothers rendered Cuba services scarcely less distinguished, and they were but of a few of many dark-skinned heroes. This struggle for independence was no patrician's war; the best stock of the island fought side by side with field-hands.

At dawn of the morning following his talk with Rosa, when the members of his command assembled, Estéban was up and ready. He had made his preparations to destroy Pancho Cueto's fields, and since the road over the hills to La Joya was long he had summoned them early.

"Be careful!" Rosa implored him. "I shall die of suspense."

"It is for you to be careful," he laughed. "Keep a good watch, and conceal yourself at the first alarm. However, I think we have taught these bandits a lesson. As for Cueto, he would run to the jungle if he saw us. He has the heart of a mouse." He kissed his sister affectionately and then rode off at the head of his tattered band.

Rosa waved him a last farewell as he disappeared into the woods, then, to occupy herself, she helped Evangelina with what little housework there was to do, later going with her to the garden patch where the *viandas* grew.

Evangelina's early devotion to her mistress had not diminished with time; if anything, it had deepened. When emancipation came she would have returned to the service of her beloved twins had it not been for Doña Isabel's refusal to accept her. As it was, she and Asensio had married, and by means of Rosa's surreptitious help they had managed to buy this little piece of land. Rosa had practised self-denial to make the purchase possible, and her self-sacrifice had borne fruit: that act of childish beneficence had created a refuge for Estéban and herself and had ripened the negro woman's affection into idolatry.

Evangelina's joy at having the girl to herself, where she could daily see her, touch her, serve her, was tempered only by the knowledge of Rosa's unhappiness. She scolded and tyrannized, she mothered and adored the girl to her heart's content; she watched over her like a hawk; she deemed no labor in her service too exacting. It would have gone ill with any one who offered harm to Rosa, for Evangelina was strong and capable; she had the arms and

the hands of a man, and she possessed the smoldering black temper of Sebastian, her father.

Even in peaceful times few people came to this clearing in the woods, far off from the main-traveled roads of the Yumuri, and the day, as usual, passed uneventfully. Evangelina worked, with one eye upon her Rosa, the other watchfully alert for danger. When evening came she prepared their scanty meal, upbraiding Rosa, meanwhile, for her attempts to assist her. Then they sat for an hour or two on the bench outside the door, talking about Juan O'Rail-ye and the probable hour of his coming.

There were no candles in Asensio's house now, and had there been, neither woman would have dared light one. To hunted creatures darkness is a friend; danger stalks under the sun.

When Rosa fretted about her brother, the negress reassured her. "Don't be frightened, little dove; he has the makings of a great soldier. It's a good thing for the Spaniards that he isn't general. Cuba would be free in no time."

"He's so reckless."

"Oh, he knows what he's doing. Besides, Asensio wouldn't let him be hurt. I took pains to tell him that if ever he permitted Estéban to suffer so much as a scratch I would disembowel him with his own machete. He knows me. Now, then, it is growing cool and the night air carries fevers. Creep into your bed and dream about that handsome lover of yours."

"No, I'll keep watch with you."

Evangelina was indignant. "Go!" she stormed. "What will happen to those red cheeks if you don't sleep? Do you think the American will want to marry an old woman with wrinkles? He may be here to-morrow—yes, I have a certain feeling about it."

Rosa obeyed, although reluctantly. "I'll sleep for a

while," she compromised, "then I'll come out and take my turn."

This exactly suited the elder woman, who knew something about the slumbers of youth. Nevertheless, dawn was still a long way off when, true to her promise, Rosa emerged from the hut with an apology for having slept so long. Evangelina protested, though her eyes were heavy and she had been yawning prodigiously for hours. But for once the girl was firm. "I can't sleep," she declared. "Why force me to lie staring into the dark while you suffer?" Having finally prevailed in her determination, she seated herself in the warm place Evangelina had vacated, and, curling her small feet under her, she settled herself, chin in hand, to think of O'Reilly. It was a good time to think, for the jungle was very still and the night like a velvet curtain.

"We had better leave the horses here." Pancho Cueto hesitatingly addressed the dim blur which he knew to be Colonel Cobo. The Colonel of Volunteers was in a vile temper, what with the long night ride and an error of Cueto's which had considerably lengthened the journey.

"Where is the house?" growled the officer.

"Not far. But the path is rocky and the horses' feet—"

"God, yes!" There was a creak of saddle leathers and a groan as the colonel dismounted. "Now, my good Cueto," he threatened, "another of your mistakes and I'll give you something to remember me by. Damnation! What a night! As black as hell."

"It will be daylight before we know it," the other said, nervously.

"Excellent! Then I can see to deal with you if you've fooled me." A curt order brought his men out of their saddles. One of their number was detailed to guard the animals, while the rest fell in behind Cueto and followed him up the trail by the starglow.

IX

MARAUDERS

THE surprise was easily effected, for Colonel Cobo's men were accomplished in this sort of work. Rosa, crouching upon her bench, heard nothing, saw nothing, until out of the shadows beside her human forms materialized. Her white dress, like a dim phosphorescent glow in dark waters, betrayed her presence, and as she sprang to her feet rough hands seized her. She screamed once, twice; then a palm closed over her mouth and she began to struggle like a cat.

Evangelina, who had waked at the first outcry, met the marauders as they rushed through the door. The hush of the sleeping jungle was shattered now; there were shouts and curses, loudly bellowed orders, a great scuffling and pounding of feet upon the dirt floor of the hut, the rickety, bark-covered walls bulged and creaked. Over all sounded the shrieks of the negress battling in the pitch-black interior like an animal in its lair. Then some one set fire to the thatch; the flames licked up the dead palm-leaves to the ridge-pole, and the surroundings leaped into view.

Rosa saw a swarthy, thick-set man in the uniform of a Colonel of Volunteers, and behind him Pancho Cueto. Tearing the hand from her lips for a moment, she cried Cueto's name, but he gave no heed. He was straining his gaze upon the door of the *bohio* in the immediate expectation of seeing Estéban emerge. He clutched a revolver in

his hand, but it was plain from the nerveless way in which he held the weapon that he had little stomach for the adventure. He was, in fact, more inclined to run than to stand his ground. Rosa shrieked his name again; then she heard the officer say:

"Where is the young fellow? I hear nothing but the squeals of that common wench."

Evangelina's cries of rage and defiance suddenly ceased, and with them the sounds of combat. From the blazing *bohio* ran two armed men, brushing sparks from their clothing. A third followed, dragging Evangelina by one naked arm. The black woman was inert; her scanty garments were well-nigh ripped from her body: she lay huddled where the soldier flung her.

Rosa felt herself swooning, and she knew nothing of what immediately followed. After a time she felt herself shaken, and heard the colonel addressing her.

"Come, come!" he was saying. "Why don't you answer me?" He dragged her farther from what was now a roaring furnace. "Where is your precious brother and that black fellow?"

Rosa could only stare dully.

"It seems we missed them," said Cueto.

"More of your bungling," Cobo broke out at him, wrathfully. "God! I've a mind to toss you into that fire." He turned his attention once more to Rosa, and with a jerk that shook her into fuller consciousness repeated: "Where are they? Speak to me."

"Gone!" she gasped. "Gone!" She struggled weakly toward Cueto, imploring him, "Pancho, don't you know me?"

"Well, we've taught him a lesson," said Cueto, grinning apprehensively at Cobo. "We've accomplished something, anyhow, eh?" He nodded at Rosa. "She's all that I told you. Look at her!"

Colonel Cobo took time to scrutinize his prisoner.

He turned her about in the light from the burning dwelling; then he agreed.

"Yes! She's a pretty little spy—quite a prize, truly. Now then!" His thick lips spread; he spoke to her more gently. "I want you to tell me about that brother of yours, eh? Cueto said I would find him here. Ha! Still frightened, I see. Well, I have a way with women; I dare say you'll be glad to tell me everything by and by." Then, seeing that his men risked a scorching in their search of the hut and were already quarreling over the scanty plunder which it afforded, he turned from Rosa to call them away.

Profiting by his inattention, Rosa wriggled out of his grasp and ran to Evangelina, who lay face down in the dirt, her limbs sprawled loosely. She flung herself upon the prostrate body and cried the black woman's name, but she could awaken no response.

The first pink of dawn was now deepening in the east, and as soon as it had grown light enough to see to travel Colonel Cobo prepared to return to his horses. The roof and walls of the *bohio* had fallen away to ashes, its skeleton of poles and its few pieces of crude furniture alone were smoldering when he called his men together and gave the word to go.

"Come, my sweetheart." He addressed himself to the girl. "Leave that carrion for the buzzards."

Rosa looked up to find him leering at her. She brushed the tears from her eyes, crying:

"Go away! In God's name haven't you done harm enough?"

"Oh, but you're going with me."

The girl rose; her face was colorless; she was aquiver with indignation. "Leave me!" she stormed. "What have I done to you? Don't—"

"*Caramba!* A temper. And you have strength, too, as I discovered. Must I bind those pretty hands or—"

Colonel Cobo reached forth, laughing, and encircled her in his powerful arms. Rosa fought him as she had fought at the first moment of desperation, but he lifted her easily and went striding across the field behind his men.

Estéban's party made good time over the hills and into the San Juan, for Asensio knew the country well. Mid-afternoon found them in sight of La Joya. Cueto's cane was thick and high; it was ready for the knife or for the torch. Making a détour, the incendiaries approached it from the east in order to have the trade-winds at their backs. They dismounted in the shelter of a wood and removed the bags which they had carried on their saddles. Inside these bags were several snakes, the largest perhaps eight feet in length. To the tail of each the negroes fastened a leather thong, and then to each thong a length of telegraph-wire, the end of which had been bent into a loop to hold a bundle of oil-soaked waste. These preliminaries accomplished, they bore the reptiles into the cane-fields at widely separated places and lighted the waste.

Estéban, from his saddle, saw the first wisps of smoke arise and grow and unwind into long ribbons, reaching deep into the standing crop. Soon tongues of flame appeared and the green tops of the cane began to shrivel and to wave as the steady east wind took effect. From the nearest conflagration a great snapping and crackling of juicy stalks arose. The thin, dry strippings with which the earth was carpeted formed a vast tinder bed, and once the fire was started there was no checking it. Smoke billowed upward and was hurried westward before the breeze; in a dozen places the fields burst into flame. From somewhere came a faint shouting, then a shot or two, and finally the ringing of a bell.

Estéban waited only until he saw that his work of devastation was well under way, then he led his followers back

toward the hills. At sunset he reined in upon the crest of a ridge and looked behind him into the valley. The whole sky was black with smoke, as if a city were in flames.

Removing his wide *jipi-japa* hat, the young man swept a mocking salutation to the east.

"So now, good Pancho Cueto," he cried, "I leave you the compliments of those twins you love so well."

In the shelter of a ravine the party took time to eat supper, their first meal since leaving home, and it was after dark when they finished. The negroes, who were thoroughly tired, were for spending the night here, but Estéban, more cautious than they, would not have it so. Accordingly, the men remounted their weary horses, though not without some grumbling, and set out. It was slow traveling, for the woods were dark and the trails were blind; the men were fairly obliged to feel their way. At length they crossed the summit and worked down toward the Yumuri, but it seemed as if daylight would never come.

"A weary ride," Estéban yawned. "I shall sleep for a week."

Asensio agreed. "That Cueto will be furious," said he. "Some day, perhaps, he and I will meet face to face. Then I shall kill him."

Estéban reined in his horse. "Look!" said he. "Yonder is a light."

The other horsemen crowded close, staring through the darkness. It was very still in the woods; dawn was less than half an hour away.

"What is Evangelina thinking about?" Asensio muttered.

"But, see! It grows brighter." There followed a moment or two during which there was no sound except the breathing of the horses and the creak of saddle leathers as the riders craned their necks to see over the low treetops below them. Then Estéban cried:

"Come! I'm—afraid it's our house." Fear gripped him, but he managed to say, calmly, "Perhaps there has been an—accident."

Asensio, muttering excitedly, was trying to crowd past him; for a few yards the two horses brushed along side by side. The distant point of light had become a glare now; it winked balefully through the openings as the party hurried toward it. But it was still a long way off, and the eastern sky had grown rosy before the dense woods of the hillside gave way to the sparser growth of the low ground.

Estéban turned a sick, white face over his shoulder and jerked out his orders; then he kicked his tired mount into a swifter gallop. It was he who first broke out into the clearing. One glance, and the story was told.

The hut was but a crumbling skeleton of charred poles. Strung out across the little field of malangas, yuccas, and sweet-potatoes were several hilarious Volunteers, their arms filled with loot from the cabin. Behind them strode an officer bearing Rosa struggling against his breast.

Estéban did not pause; he drove his horse headlong through the soft red earth of the garden. His sudden appearance seemed briefly to paralyze the marauders. It was a moment before they could drop their spoils, unsling their rifles, and begin to fire at him, and by that time he had covered half the distance to his sister. Those rifle-shots came faintly to Estéban's ears; he scarcely heard them; he merely lowered his head and rode straight at that black-visaged colonel, sobbing and whimpering in his fury.

But in spite of his speed he made no difficult target. A bullet brought his horse down and the boy went flying over its neck. Nothing but the loose loam saved him from injury. As he rose to his feet, breathless and covered with the red dirt, there came a swift thudding of hoofs and Asensio swept past him like a rocket. Estéban caught one glimpse of the negro's face, a fleeting vision of white

teeth bared to the gums, of distended yellow eyes, of flat, distorted features; then Asensio was fairly upon Colonel Cobo. The colonel, who had dropped his burden, now tried to dodge. Asensio slashed once at him with his long, murderous machete, but the next instant he was engaged with a trooper who had fired almost into his face.

The other negroes also were in the open by this time, yelling and firing as fast as they could work the bolts of their rifles, and although they aimed at nothing in particular, the effect of their fusillade was all that could be wished. Cobo's men, led by the terrified Pancho Cueto, turned and fled for cover, believing themselves in danger of annihilation. Nor was the colonel himself in any condition to rally them, for Asensio's blade had cloven one full dark cheek to the bone, and the shock and pain had unnerved him; he was frightened at sight of the blood that streamed down over the breast of his white tunic, and so, when he saw his men turn tail, he followed suit, lunging through the lush garden growth, holding his wound in his hand and shrieking profane commands which went unheeded.

The field was small, the jungle was close at hand. A moment and the interlopers had vanished into it, all but one, who lay kicking among the broad malanga-leaves, and over whom Asensio kept spurring his terrified horse, hacking downward with insane fury.

This was the first hand-to-hand encounter Estéban's men had had, and their swift victory rendered them ferocious. Flinging their guns aside, they went crashing into the brush on the trail of their enemies.

Rosa found herself in her brother's arms, sobbing out the story of the outrage and quivering at every sound of the chase. He was caressing her, and telling her to have no further fears; both of them were fairly hysterical. Even before Estéban had heard all, Lorenzo, the mulatto, reappeared, leading three cavalry horses and shouting

extravagant praises of his own bravery. Estéban complimented him and the fellow galloped away again, voicing the most blood-curdling threats.

Evangelina, thanks to her thick skull, was not dead. In the course of time under Rosa's and Estéban's ministrations she regained her senses, and when the other men returned they found her lying sick and dazed, but otherwise quite whole.

Then, there beside the ruins of the hut, was a strange scene of rejoicing. Asensio, recovered now from his burst of savagery, was tearful, compassionate; his comrades laughed and chattered and bragged about their prodigious deeds of valor. Over and over they recounted their versions of the encounter, each more fanciful than the other, until it seemed that they must have left the forest filled with corpses.

Estéban alone was grave. He had heard of Colonel Cobo, and, remembering that denim-clad figure out yonder in the trampled garden, he knew that serious consequences would follow. The Volunteers were revengeful; their colonel was not the sort of man to forgive a deep humiliation. Doubtless he would put a price upon the heads of all of them, and certainly he would never allow them another encounter upon anything like even terms. Then, too, the narrowness of Rosa's escape caused the boy's heart to dissolve with terror.

After a conference with Asensio he decided that they must prepare for flight, and late that afternoon they all set out to seek a safer refuge, Evangelina in tears at leaving her precious garden plot. Their led horse, one of those Lorenzo had captured, carried a pitifully light burden—only some tools, some pans and kettles, and a roll of charred bedclothes.

Johnnie O'Reilly had no difficulty in locating the residence of Ignacio Alvarado, but to communicate with

him was quite another matter, inasmuch as his every step was dogged by that persistent shadow from Neuvitas. Leslie Branch had told him enough about conditions here in Puerto Principe to make him extremely cautious, and after their first talk he had once more concealed his revolver in a safe hiding-place, taking good care thereafter that nothing in his conduct should awaken suspicion.

Unfortunately his room was on the second floor of the hotel, and hence his goings and comings were always open to observation. But he noted that a window at one end of the upper hall overlooked a sloping, tile-roofed shed, and that the garden wall behind the hotel premises was not provided with those barbarous spikes or broken bottles which decorate so many Cuban walls. It promised him a means of egress when the time should come to use it. In this hall, moreover, directly opposite his door there was an oil bracket-lamp which gave light to the passageway, and which was forever going out, a fact which the young man noted with satisfaction.

One evening, several days after his arrival, a sudden rain-storm drove O'Reilly indoors, and as he ascended to his room he saw that the lamp in the hallway flared and smoked at every gust of wind. It was very dark outside; he reasoned that the streets would be deserted. Hastily securing that book which Alvarado, the dentist, had given him, he took a position close inside his door. When he heard the spy pass and enter the next chamber he stole out into the hall and breathed into the lamp-chimney. A moment later he was safely through the window and was working his way down the shed roof, praying that his movements had not been seen and that the tiles were firm. The rain was driving in sheets and he was wet to the skin when he dropped into the patio; nevertheless he was laughing to himself. He nimbly scaled the wall, crossed an inclosure, climbed a second wall, and descended into a dark side street. Taking advantage of the densest

shadows and the numerous overhanging balconies, he set out at a brisk trot.

A light showed through the barred windows of the Alvarado home, indicating that the family was in. After some fumbling O'Reilly laid hold of the latch; then, without knocking, he opened the front door and stepped in.

He found himself, as he had expected, in the parlor, a high-ceilinged, sparsely furnished room with a glazed floor of Spanish mosaics. His sudden appearance threw the occupants into alarm: a woman cried out sharply; a man whom O'Reilly identified as Ignacio Alvarado himself leaped to his feet and faced him, exclaiming:

"Who are you?"

"I'm a friend. Don't be alarmed." Johnnie summoned his most agreeable smile, then he extended the sodden package he had carried beneath his arm. "I come from your brother Tómas. He asked me to hand you this book and to say that he is returning it with his thanks."

"What are you saying?" Plainly the speaker did not comprehend; there was nothing but apprehension in his voice.

O'Reilly tore the wet paper from the volume and laid it in Alvarado's hand. "Look at it, please, and you'll understand. I didn't take time to knock, for fear I might be followed."

Alvarado stared first at the book, then at his caller. After a moment he made a sign to his wife, who left the room. Wetting his lips, he inquired, with an effort, "What do you want?"

O'Reilly told him in a few words. Alvarado showed relief; he even smiled. "I see, but—*Caramba!* You gave me a start. And this book! Ha! Tómas will have his jokes. It is well you took precautions, for I am under surveillance. I'll help you, yes! But you must not come here again. Return to your hotel

and— Let me think." Señor Alvarado frowned in deepest thought; then he said: "I have it! Every morning at half past nine a man wearing a Panama hat and a gray silk necktie with a large gold pin will pass along the sidewalk across the street from the Isla de Cuba. You will know him. One day, I cannot promise how soon, he will lift his hat thus, and wipe his face. You understand? Good. Follow him. He will give you final directions. Meanwhile I will make known your presence to certain of our friends who can be trusted. You know Manin, the druggist? Well, you can talk to him, and he will keep you posted as to our progress. Now go before some one comes."

O'Reilly wrung the Cuban's hand. Then he stepped out into the night, leaving a pool of water on the clean blue tiles where he had stood.

X

O'REILLY TALKS HOG LATIN

IN the days that followed his call on Ignacio Alvarado, O'Reilly behaved so openly that the Secret Service agent detailed to watch him relaxed his vigilance. Certainly there was nothing suspicious in the conduct of a fellow who sat all the morning tipped back in a hotel chair, languidly scanning the passers-by, whose afternoons were spent on the streets or at the soda-fountain in Manin's drug-store, and whose evenings were devoted to aimless gossip with his countryman, the newspaper writer. Manifestly this O'Reilly was a harmless person. But the spy did not guess how frantic Johnnie was becoming at this delay, how he inwardly chafed and fretted when two weeks had rolled by and still no signal had come. Manin told him to be patient; he assured him that word had been sent into the Cubitas hills, and that friends were busy in his behalf; but Johnnie was eager to be up and doing. This inaction paralyzed him; it made him almost ill to think how much time had slipped away. Then, too, his money was running low.

At last, however, the day arrived when the man with the gray necktie raised his hat and wiped his brow as he passed the Isla de Cuba. Johnnie could scarcely hold himself in his chair. By and by he rose, stretching himself, and sauntered after the fellow. For several blocks he kept him in sight, but without receiving any further sign. The man paused to greet friends, he stopped at

several shops, and his aimless wanderings continued for the best part of an hour, during which he led the way to the outskirts of the city. Fortunately O'Reilly's shadow was nowhere in sight.

Without a glance over his shoulder the man turned into a large, walled inclosure. When Johnnie followed he found himself in one of the old cemeteries. Ahead of him, up a shady avenue bordered with trees, the stranger hurried; then he swerved to his left, and when O'Reilly came to the point where he had disappeared there was nobody in sight. Apprehending that he had made some mistake in the signal, O'Reilly hastened down the walk. Then at last, to his great relief, he heard a sibilant:

"Psst! Psst!"

It came from behind a screen of shrubbery, and there he found the Cuban waiting. The latter began rapidly:

"Our plans are complete. Listen closely. One week from to-day, at ten o'clock in the morning, you must be in Manin's drug-store. Directly across the street you will see two negroes with three horses. At fifteen minutes past ten walk out San Rafael Street to the edge of the city, where the hospital stands. The negroes will follow you. There is a fort near by—"

"I know."

"It commands the road. You will be challenged if you pass it, so turn in at the hospital. But do not enter the gates, for the negroes will overtake you at that point. They will stop to adjust the saron of the lead horse. That will be your signal; mount him and ride fast. The Spaniards will fire at you, but if you are hit one of the blacks will take you on his horse. If one of them is hit or his horse falls you must stop and take him up. Ride out half a mile and you will find a band of Insurrectos in the woods at the right. They know you are coming. Now, adois and good luck."

With a smile and a quick grip of the hand the messenger walked swiftly away. O'Reilly returned to his hotel.

At last! One week, and this numbing, heartbreaking delay would end; he would be free to take up his quest. O'Reilly choked at the thought; the blood drummed in his ears. Rosa would think he was never coming; she would surely believe that his heart had changed. As if it could! "O God! Come quickly, if you love me." Well, a week was only seven days. He longed to risk those Spanish bullets this very hour.

But those seven days were more than a week, they were seven eternities. The hours were like lead; O'Reilly could compose his mind to nothing; he was in a fever of impatience.

Meanwhile, he was compelled to see a good deal of Leslie Branch. The reporter was anything but cheerful company, for, believing firmly in the steady progress of his malady, he was weighed down by the deepest melancholy. The fellow was a veritable cave of despair; he voiced never-ceasing complaints; nothing suited him; and but for something likable in the man—an effect due in part to the fact that his chronic irritation took amusing forms—he would have been an intolerable bore. To cheer him up was quite impossible, and although it seemed to Johnnie that the Cuban climate agreed with him and that he lacked only strength of will to cheat the grave, the mere suggestion of such a thought was offensive to the invalid. He construed every optimistic word, every effort at encouragement, either as a reflection upon his sincerity or as the indication of a heartless indifference to his sufferings. He continued to talk wistfully about joining the Insurrectos, and O'Reilly would have been glad to put him in the way of realizing his fantastic ambition to "taste the salt of life" had it been in his power; but, since he himself depended upon friends unknown to him, he did not dare to risk complicating

matters. In fact, he did not even tell Branch of his coming adventure.

The day of days dawned at last, and Johnnie was early at Manin's soda-fountain, drinking insipid beverages and anxiously watching the street. In due time the negroes appeared, their straw *sarons* laden with produce which they innocently disposed of. O'Reilly began to consult his watch with such frequency that the druggist joked him.

Manin's banter was interrupted by a bugle-call. Down the street came perhaps two hundred mounted troops. They wheeled into San Rafael Street at a gallop and disappeared in the direction of the suburbs.

"Now what does that mean?" murmured the druggist. "Wait here while I go to the roof where I can see something."

O'Reilly tried to compose himself, meanwhile becoming aware of a growing excitement in the street. Pedestrians had halted, shopkeepers had come to their doors, questions were flying from mouth to mouth. Then from the direction of the fort at the end of San Rafael Street sounded a faint rattling fusillade, more bugle-calls, and finally the thin, distant shouting of men.

"Rebels!" some one cried.

"Dios mio, they are attacking the city!"

"They have audacity, eh?"

The roofs were black with people now. Manin came hurrying down into the store.

"Something has gone wrong," he whispered. "They're fighting out yonder in the woods. There has been some treachery."

"It is ten-fifteen," said O'Reilly. "I must be going."

Manin stared at him. "You don't understand—"

"Those black fellows are getting their horses ready. I'm going."

The druggist tried to force Johnnie into a chair. "Mad-

man!" he panted. "I tell you our friends have been betrayed; they are retreating. Go back to your hotel quickly."

For the first time during their acquaintance Manin heard the good-natured American curse; O'Reilly's blue eyes were blazing; he had let go of himself completely.

"I'm going!" he cried, hoarsely. "All the damned Spaniards in Cuba won't stop me. God! I've waited too long—I should have made a break—"

"Idiot!" stormed the druggist. "You wish to die, eh?"

O'Reilly ripped out another oath and fought off the other's restraining hands.

"Very well, then," cried Manin, "but have some thought of us who have risked our lives for you. Suppose you should escape? How would our troops receive you now? Would they not think you had cunningly arranged this trap?"

A light of reason slowly reappeared in the younger man's eyes.

"No!" Manin pressed his advantage. "You must wait until—" He broke off abruptly and stepped behind his counter, for a man in the uniform of a Spanish lieutenant had entered the store.

The new-comer walked directly to O'Reilly; he was a clean-cut, alert young fellow. After a searching glance around the place he spoke in a voice audible to both men:

"Señor, you are in danger. To-night, at midnight, you will be arrested. I beg of you to see that there is nothing incriminating in your possession."

O'Reilly's face betrayed his amazement. "Arrested? What for? On what charge—"

The stranger shrugged. "I don't know. That newspaper man will be arrested at the same moment, so you had better warn him. But be careful where and how you

do so, for all his movements are watched, all his words are overheard."

"Why do you tell me this—you? Is it some scheme to—to incriminate me?" O'Reilly inquired.

Manin was leaning over the counter, his face drawn with anxiety, his lips framing the same question.

"No!" The lieutenant shook his head. "I am a friend—a Cuban, in spite of this uniform. If you repeat my words I shall be shot within the hour. I implore you"—his voice became more urgent—"to heed my warning. I don't know what you had to do with this skirmish out San Rafael Street, but a short time ago a message came from the fortina that Insurrectos were in the woods close by. I hope it will not prove to be a bloody encounter. And now remember—midnight!" He bowed, turned to the door, and was gone.

Manin heaved a sigh of relief. "*Caramba!* He gave me a fright: I thought my time had come. But what did I tell you, eh?"

"That fellow is a Cuban spy!"

"No doubt. We have many friends. Well! You see what would have happened if you had tried to go. Now then, you must prepare yourself for the worst."

Perhaps a half-hour later O'Reilly saw the cavalry squadron returning to its barracks. The men were laughing; they were shouting brief boastful accounts of their encounter to the people on the sidewalks. Two of them were sick and white; they lurched in their saddles, and were supported by their comrades, but it was not upon them that the eyes of the onlookers centered. Through the filth of the street behind the cavalcade trailed a limp bundle of rags which had once been a man. It was tied to a rope and it dragged heavily; its limbs were loose; its face, blackened by mud, stared blindly skyward.

O'Reilly gazed at the object with horrified fascination;

then with a sudden sick feeling of dizziness he retired to his room, asking himself if he were responsible for that poor fellow's death.

Meanwhile the citizens of Puerto Principe looked on with stony eyes. There was no cheering among them, only a hush in their chatter, above which sounded the rattle of accoutrements, the clump-clump of hoofs, and the exultant voices of the Spanish troopers.

For some reason or other Leslie Branch was nowhere to be found; his room was locked and no one had seen him; hence there was no possibility of warning him, until that evening, when he appeared while O'Reilly was making a pretense of eating dinner.

"Where the devil have you been?" the latter inquired, anxiously.

"Been getting out my weekly joke about the revolution. Had to write up this morning's 'battle.' Couldn't work in my room, so I—"

"Sit down; and don't jump when I tell you what has happened. We're going to be pinched at midnight."

"Why midnight?"

"I don't know, unless that's the fashionable hour for military calls."

"What's it all about?"

"I guess they don't like us. Have you got anything incriminating about you?"

"N-no! Nothing, except my citizen's papers and—a letter of introduction to General Maximo Gomez."

O'Reilly suddenly lost what appetite remained to him. "Nothing *except* a letter to General Gomez!" he cried. "Good Lord, Branch! Were you ever shot at sunrise?"

The reporter coughed dismally. "N-no! It's too damp. I suppose you mean to hint I'd better destroy that letter, eh?"

"Just as quickly as possible. Where is it?"

"In my room."

"Hm-m! Then I'm not sure you'll have a chance to destroy it." O'Reilly was thinking rapidly. "From what I was told I suspect you are being watched even there."

"Bullets! I thought as much."

"Would you mind using some other oath?" O'Reilly broke out, irritably. "I've always considered 'bullets' weak and ineffective, but—it has a significance."

"There's a new lodger in the room next to me. I've heard him moving around. I'll bet he's got a peephole in the wall." Branch was visibly excited.

"Quite likely. I have the same kind of a neighbor; that is he watching us now."

Leslie cast a hostile eye at the man his friend indicated. "Looks like a miserable spy, doesn't he? But, say, how am I going to make away with that letter?"

"I'm trying to think," said Johnnie. After a time he rose from the table and the two strolled out. Johnnie was still thinking.

When the two arrived at Branch's quarters O'Reilly scrutinized the room as closely as he dared, and then sat for some time idly gossiping. Both men were under a considerable strain, for they thought it more than likely that hostile eyes were upon them. It gave them an uncomfortable thrill; and while it seemed a simple thing to burn that letter of introduction, they realized that if their suspicions were correct such a procedure would only serve to deepen their difficulties. Nothing they could later say would explain to the satisfaction of the authorities so questionable an act. The mere destruction of a mysterious document, particularly at this late hour, would look altogether too queer; it might easily cause their complete undoing. Inasmuch as his enemies were waiting only for an excuse to be rid of him, O'Reilly knew that deportation was the least he could expect, and at the thought his fingers itched to hold that letter over the lamp-chimney.

Imprisonment, almost any punishment, was better than deportation. That would mean beginning all over again.

While he was talking he used his eyes, and finally a plan suggested itself. To make doubly sure that his words would not be understood he inquired, casually:

"Do you speak any foreign languages?"

"Sure! Spanish and—hog Latin."

In spite of himself O'Reilly grinned; then making use of that incoherent derangement of syllables upon the use of which every American boy prides himself, he directed Branch's attention to the tiles of the roof overhead.

The reporter's wits were sharp; his eyes brightened; he nodded his instant understanding. The house had but one story, its roof was constructed of the common, half-round Cuban tiling, each piece about two feet long. These tiles were laid in parallel rows from ridge-pole to eave, and these rows were locked together by other tiling laid bottom side up over them. Where the convex faces of the lower layer overlapped, after the fashion of shingles, were numerous interstices due to imperfections in manufacture; more than one of these was large enough to form a hiding-place for a letter.

Continuing to disguise his language, O'Reilly directed his companion to open the table drawer in which the unwelcome document reposed and to see that it was where he could instantly lay hands upon it in the dark. Branch did as he was told.

For some time longer they talked; then they rose as if to leave the room. O'Reilly took his stand near the door and directly beneath the most promising crevice in the roof, which at this point was perhaps nine feet from the floor.

Branch stooped over the table and breathed into the lamp-chimney; the room was plunged into darkness. There followed a faint rustling of paper; the next instant he was at O'Reilly's side. Stooping, Johnnie seized him

about the knees and lifted him. There was the briefest pause; then feeling a pinch upon his shoulder, O'Reilly lowered his burden noiselessly, and the two men left the room.

When they were safely out in the street Branch rubbed his head and complained: "Bullets, you're strong! You nearly broke a rafter with my head. But I guess I got 'em out of sight."

"*Them?*"

"Yes. I hid my American 'papers,' too. These Dons are sore on Yankees, you know. I'm going to be an Englishman, and you'd better follow suit. I'm the—the youngest son of the Earl of Pawtucket, and you'd better tell 'em your uncle was the Duke of Ireland, or something."

XI

THE HAND OF THE CAPTAIN-GENERAL

ON the stroke of midnight O'Reilly was arrested. After a thorough search of his person and his premises he was escorted to Government headquarters, where he found Leslie Branch.

The invalid looked taller, thinner, more bloodless than ever, and his air of settled gloom admirably became the situation.

"Hello, Earl. What luck?" Johnnie flashed at him.

"Good!"

An officer sharply commanded them to be silent.

There ensued a long delay, introduced, perhaps, for its effect upon the prisoners; then they were led into a large room where, it seemed, the entire staff of the Spanish garrison was waiting. It was an imposing collection of uniforms, a row of grim faces and hostile eyes, which the two Americans beheld. Spread out upon a table in front of the officers were the personal belongings of both men.

The prisoners were ordered to stand side by side, facing their accusers. Then each in turn was subjected to a rigorous examination. Owing to his acquaintance with Spanish, O'Reilly was able to defend himself without the aid of an interpreter. He began by asserting that he had come to Cuba for his health, and declared that he had endeavored at all times since his arrival to conduct himself in strict conformity with local regulations. If in any way he had offended, he had not done so intentionally.

He denied having the remotest connection with the rebels, and demanded an explanation of his arrest.

But his plausible words did not in the least affect his hearers. General Antuna, the *comandante*, a square-faced man with the airs of a courtier, but with the bold, hard eyes of a fighter, leaned forward, saying:

"So you suffer from ill health, señor?"

"I do, severely. Rheumatism."

The general nodded. "Three days ago you were overtaken by a rain-storm while walking through the city."

"Yes, sir."

"When the rain had passed, you returned to your hotel. At the junction of San Rafael and Estrella streets a pool of water had gathered and you leaped it. Am I right?"

"No doubt."

General Antuna consulted a report before him. "That pool measured six feet four inches in width. Do you ask me to believe that a person suffering from rheumatism could do that?"

Leslie Branch shifted his weight and wet his lips, but O'Reilly only shrugged impatiently. "My dear General," said he, "did you never experience a neuralgia? Well then, was the pain continuous? In this climate my affliction troubles me very little. That is why I remain here."

From among the articles in front of him the general selected a solitary 44-caliber revolver cartridge and, holding it up, said:

"What do you say to this?"

"I don't know what to say. Where did it come from?"

"It was found in the cloth pocket of your valise."

O'Reilly frowned; then a light of understanding irradiated his frank countenance. "It must have lain there ever since I left Matanzas, three months ago."

"Ha! Matanzas!" fiercely ejaculated a colonel. "What were you doing in Matanzas?"

It was unnecessary to prevaricate now. Johnnie told of his earlier connection with the Carter Importing Company, gave names, dates, and facts to bear out his statements, and challenged his accusers to verify them.

Undoubtedly some of his hearers were impressed, but they were by no means convinced of the innocence of his present purpose, and, in fact, the ferocious colonel seemed to regard past residence in Cuba as proof conclusive of a present connection with the rebels. Johnnie gathered that he was suspected of being one of those American engineers who were reported to have been engaged to instruct the enemy in the use of explosives: his inquisitors did their best to wring such an admission from him or to entrap him into the use of some technical phrase, some slip of the tongue which would verify their suspicions. They even examined his hands with minutest care, as if to find some telltale callous or chemical discoloration which would convict him. Then finally, to give him the lie absolute, the aggressive colonel seized a nickel-plated atomizer from the table and brandished it triumphantly before the young men's eyes.

"Enough of this pretense!" he cried. "What is this instrument, eh?"

"It is evidently an atomizer, a nasal syringe. I never saw it before."

"It's mine," said Leslie Branch; but the colonel did not heed the interruption.

"Ha! And pray explain its use."

Johnnie undertook to do so, but it was plain that his words carried no conviction, for his mocking inquisitor gave a loud snort and gestured eloquently to his commander. "There you have it!" he declared, proudly. "This impostor betrays himself."

The other officers were eying the unfamiliar article curiously; one of them ventured gingerly to handle it; they exchanged whispers.

"What do you call it?" the general inquired, leaning forward.

This was the colonel's moment. "I will tell you!" he said, with a sneer at O'Reilly. "I am something of a genius at mechanical inventions, and therefore I am not for a moment deceived by this fellow's common lies. This"—he paused dramatically and held his brother officers with a burning glance—"this instrument, in my opinion, was devised for the purpose of injecting fulminate of mercury into dynamite."

There was a breathless hush. The Spaniards stared at the little syringe with amazement.

"And how does it operate?" queried one.

"It is one of those ingenious Yankee contrivances. I have never seen one quite like it, but my intelligence makes its principle plain. Evidently one inserts the tube into the dynamite, so, and presses the bulb—"

There came a loud cry from General Antuna, who had bent closer; he clapped his hands to his face and staggered from his chair, for in suiting his action to his words the colonel had squeezed the bulb, with the result that a spray of salt water had squirted fairly into his superior officer's interested and attentive countenance.

"My eyes! Dios mio! I am blinded for life!" shouted the unhappy general, and his subordinates looked on, frozen with consternation.

The author of this calamity blanched; he was stricken dumb with horror.

Some one cried: "A doctor, quickly. Jesus Cristo! Such carelessness!"

"This is terrible!" another stammered. "It will explode next."

There was a concerted scramble away from the table.

Leslie Branch laughed—it was the first time that O'Reilly had ever heard him give audible evidence of amusement. His reedy frame was shaken as by a painful

spasm; his colorless face was distorted, and from his lips issued queer, hysterical barks and chortles. "Tell 'em it's nothing but brine," he said, chokingly.

When this welcome intelligence had been translated, and when the general had proved it to be true, there was a great sigh of relief, followed by a subdued titter at the colonel's expense. The latter was chagrined. Having made himself and the *comandante* ridiculous, he took refuge behind an assumption of somber and offended dignity. But it was plain that he still considered these Americans dangerous people, and that his suspicions were as keen as ever.

The interruption served to end O'Reilly's ordeal, for the moment at least, and attention was now turned to his companion. It was evident from the first that Branch's case was hopeless. He readily acknowledged himself to be a newspaper writer, and admitted having sent articles for publication through the mails. This was quite enough; from the attitude of the military men it promised to go hard with him. But he sprung a surprise by boldly proclaiming himself an English citizen and warning his captors not to treat him with the contempt or with the severity they reserved for Americans. Curiously his words had an effect. Judgment for the moment was suspended, and the two prisoners were led away, after which another delay ensued.

At last O'Reilly was recalled; but when he re-entered the big room he found General Antuna awaiting him, alone.

"Permit me to apologize for the inconvenience we have put you to," the *comandante* began.

"Then am I free?"

"You are."

"I thank you."

The general's hard eyes gleamed. "Personally I at no time put faith in the idea that you are a powder expert," said he. "No. I had my own suspicions and I regret

to say this inquiry has not in the least served to lessen them."

"Indeed? May I ask of what you suspect me?" Johnnie was genuinely interested.

The general spoke with force and gravity: "Mr. O'Reilly, I believe you to be a far greater menace to the interests of my country than—well, than a score of dynamite experts. I believe you are a writer."

The American smiled. "Are writers such dangerous people?"

"That altogether depends upon circumstances. The United States is inclined to recognize the belligerency of these Cuban rebels, and her relations with Spain are becoming daily more strained; ill-feeling grows, and all because of the exaggerations, the mendacities, that have gone forth from here to your newspapers. We are determined to put down this uprising in our own way; we will tolerate no foreign interference. War is never a pleasant thing, but you journalists have magnified its horrors and misrepresented the cause of Spain until you threaten to bring on another and a more horrible combat. Now then, you understand what I mean when I say that you are more dangerous than a powder expert; that your pen can do more injury, can cause the death of more Spanish troops than could a regiment of Americans with dynamite. Your English friend makes no secret of his business, so we shall escort him to Neuvitas and see him safely out of the country, once for all."

"And yet you permit me to remain?" Johnnie was surprised.

"For the present, yes! That is my official message to you. Privately, however"—the speaker eyed O'Reilly with a disconcerting expression—"I would like to warn you. You are a bright fellow, and you have a way with you—there's no denying it. Under other conditions it would be a pleasure to know you better. It grieves me,

therefore, to warn you that your further stay in Cuba will not be—pleasant. I almost regret that there is no conclusive evidence against you; it would so simplify matters. Come now, hadn't you better acknowledge that I have guessed your secret?"

O'Reilly's perplexity was changing to dismay, for it seemed to him he was being played with; nevertheless, he shook his head. "I would only be deceiving you, sir," he said.

General Antuna sighed. "Then I see embarrassments ahead for both of us."

"More arrests?"

"Not necessarily. Understand me, I speak as one gentleman to another, but—you must have noticed that Americans are unpopular with our troops. Eh? They are impulsive, these troopers; accidents cannot be prevented. Suppose something should happen to you? There is the trouble. You came to Cuba to enjoy its climate; you cannot be expected to remain indoors. Of course not. Well! Among our soldiers are many new recruits, patriotic, enthusiastic young fellows, but—careless. They are wretchedly unproficient marksmen, and they haven't learned the dangers of promiscuous rifle fire. They are forever shooting at things, merely to score a hit. Would you believe it? Oh, I have to discipline them frequently. To think of you going abroad through the streets, therefore, worries me intensely."

"Your solicitude is touching." O'Reilly bowed mockingly; but disregarding his tone, General Antuna proceeded in the same false key:

"Suppose you should be found dead some day. Imagine my feelings." The speaker's tone and expression were eloquent of concern. "How could I fix the responsibility?"

"By having me followed, as usual, I dare say," O'Reilly said, bitterly.

"Oh, you will of course be shadowed day and night; in fact, to be quite sure of your—er—safety I shall ask you to permit one of my men to accompany you everywhere and even to share your room. We shall try never to lose sight of you, depend upon it. But these detectives are careless fellows at best; I don't trust them. Of course such precautions would exonerate me from all blame and relieve my Government from any responsibility for injury to you, but, nevertheless, it would tend to complicate relations already strained. You see I am quite honest with you." The general allowed time for his words to sink in; then he sighed once more. "I wish you could find another climate equally beneficial to your rheumatism. It would lift a great load from my mind. I could offer you the hospitality of an escort to Neuvitas, and your friend Mr. Branch is such good company he would so shorten your trip to New York!" The speaker paused hopefully; that same sardonic flicker was on his lips.

Johnnie could not summon an answering smile, for his heart was like lead. He realized now the utter futility of resistance; he knew that to remain in Puerto Principe after this thinly veiled warning would be to court destruction—and destruction of a shocking character against which it would be impossible to guard. Even an espionage stricter than that to which he had been subjected would utterly defeat his plans. After a moment of thought he said, gravely:

"I appreciate the delicacy of your consideration, sir, and—I shall go."

General Antuna leaped to his feet, his grim face alight; striding to O'Reilly, he pressed his hands—he seemed upon the point of embracing him. "I thank you!" he cried. "You render me a supreme service. See, I breathe easy. Permit me to offer you refreshment—one of our famous Spanish wines. No? Then the best cigar in all Cuba!"

His expressions of gratitude were fulsome; he swore that

O'Reilly had done him the greatest favor of his life, but his words were like poison to his hearer.

"You embarrass me," O'Reilly told him, endeavoring to carry off his defeat with some show of grace. In his bitterness he could not refrain from adding, "If my accursed affliction returns, perhaps we shall meet again before long, either here or elsewhere."

"Oh, I have little hope for such a pleasure," the general quickly replied. "But if we do meet, remember we Spaniards have a cure for rheumatism. It is unpleasant, but efficacious. A little, nickel-plated pill, that is all." General Antuna's teeth shone for an instant. "There is another remedy, not quite so immediate in its effect, but a good one. I have tried it and found it excellent. Drink plenty of cocoanut-water! That is the Cuban remedy; the other I call the Spanish cure. Cocoanuts are splendid. I shall see that a crate of the choicest fruit is placed aboard your steamer. Accept them with my compliments, and when you partake of them think of me."

O'Reilly did think of General Antuna, not only when he was escorted to the railway station at daylight, but when he and Branch took their seats and their guards filed in behind them. He assured himself moodily that he would not cease to think of that sardonic old joker for a long time to come. He cursed savagely; the memory of these wasted weeks, the narrow margin of his failure, filled him with a sick feeling of dismay and impotence. His mind quailed at the consequence of this new delay. Where was Rosa now? How and when would he return? With difficulty he resisted the impulse to fling himself from the moving train; but he composed himself by the thought that Cuba was not fenced about with bayonets. He would come back.

Leslie Branch broke in upon his gloomy preoccupation by asking, "How much money have you?"

"Less than ten dollars."

"You're rich. My landlady cleaned me. Is it the practice of beneficent monarchies to provide transportation for their departing guests?"

"Undoubtedly."

Branch coughed dismally. "It 'll be all right if they just buy me a ticket to the first fog. One more hemorrhage and I'll wing my way aloft. God! I'd hate to be buried at sea."

"Cheer up!" O'Reilly reassured him, irritably. "There may be ice aboard."

"*Ice!*" Leslie gasped. "Oh, bullets!"

In marked contrast to the difficulties of entering Cuba was the ease of leaving it. A ship was sailing from Neuvitas on the very afternoon when the two Americans arrived, and they were hurried aboard. Not until the anchor was up did their military escort depart from them.

With angry, brooding eyes O'Reilly watched the white houses along the water-front dwindle away, the mangrove swamps slip past, and the hills rise out of their purple haze. When the salt breath of the trades came to his nostrils he turned into his state-room, and, taking the crate of cocoanuts with which General Antuna had thoughtfully provided him, he bore it to the rail and dropped it overboard.

"Rheumatism was a fool disease, anyhow," he muttered.

"Great news!" Estéban Varona announced one day as he dismounted after a foraging trip into the Yumuri. "We met some of Lacret's men and they told us that Spain has recalled Captain-General Campos. He acknowledges himself powerless to stem the flood of Cuban revolution. What do you say to that?"

"Does that mean the end of the war?" Rosa eagerly inquired.

"Oh no. They have sent a new man—he's in Havana now—a dark little, old fellow who never smiles. He has a

long nose and a big chin; he dresses all in black—a very 'jew-bird' in appearance, from what I hear. His name is Weyler—Valeriano Weyler, Marquis of Teneriffe." Estéban laughed tolerantly, for as yet the name of Weyler meant nothing to him.

"No wonder we knew nothing about it," said the girl. "We hide like animals and we see no one for weeks at a time. I sometimes wonder how O'Reilly will manage to find us."

"Oh, he'll manage it somehow," Estéban declared, cheerfully. Then he ran an approving eye over the new *bohio* and the new garden plot which Evangelina had courageously begun. "We're not so badly fixed, are we? At least Colonel Cobo won't find us so readily this time."

"Cobo!" shuddered the girl. "I dream about him."

Estéban scowled. "I've seen him at a distance several times, but he takes pains to guard himself well when he comes into the Yumuri. They say he's trying to destroy the whole valley."

"He will never forget."

Estéban covertly appraised his sister's charms, but respecting her terror of Cobo he did not speak his thoughts. He was certain, however, that Rosa knew, as well as he, what motive lay behind the fellow's tireless persecutions of the valley dwellers; for in spite of their isolation stories of Cobo had reached the refugees—stories that had rendered both the boy and the girl sick with apprehension. The colonel, it seemed, had nearly died of his machete wound, and on recovering he had sworn to exterminate the wasps that had stung him. He had sworn other oaths, too, oaths that robbed Estéban of his sleep.

Estéban idolized his sister; her loyalty to him was the most precious thing of his life. Therefore, the thought of that swarthy ruffian hunting her down as a hound hangs to the trail of a doe awoke in him a terrible anger. Second only to his hatred for the guerrilla chief was his

bitterness against the traitor, Pancho Cueto, who had capped his villainy by setting this new peril upon them; and since Rosa's safety and his own honor called for the death of both men, he had sworn that somehow he would effect it. It was, of course, a difficult matter to get at the Colonel of Volunteers, but Cueto still lived in the midst of his blackened fields, and it was against him that the boy was now planning to launch his first blow.

The mention of Cobo's name had momentarily distracted Estéban's thoughts. Now he collected them and said:

"Wait! I am forgetting something. See what Lacret's men handed me; they are posted from one end of the island to the other." He displayed a printed *bando*, or proclamation, signed by the new captain-general, and read as follows:

"All inhabitants of the country districts, or those who reside outside the lines of fortifications of the towns, shall, within a period of eight days, enter the towns which are occupied by the troops. Any individual found outside the lines in the country at the expiration of this period shall be considered a rebel and shall be dealt with as such."

It was that inhuman order of concentration, the result of which proved to be without parallel in military history —an order which gave its savage author the name of being the arch-fiend of a nation reputed peculiarly cruel. Neither Estéban nor Rosa, however, grasped the full significance of the proclamation; no one could have done so. No eye could have foreseen the merciless butchery of non-combatants, the starvation and death by disease of hordes of helpless men, women, and children herded into the cities. Four hundred thousand Cubans driven from their homes into shelterless prison camps; more than two hundred thousand dead from hunger and disease; a fruitful land laid bare of all that could serve as food.

and changed to an ash-gray desolation; gaunt famine from Oriente to Pinar del Rio—that was the sequel to those printed words of "Weyler the Butcher" which Estéban read.

"Eight days! When is the time up?" Rosa inquired.

"Bless you, this is already two weeks old!" her brother told her.

"Why, then, it means that we'll be shot if we're caught."

"Exactly! But we sha'n't be caught, eh? Let the timid ones take fright at the squeaks of this old blackbird. Let them go into the cities: we shall have the more to eat!" Estéban crumpled the paper in his hand and dropped it. "Meanwhile I shall proceed toward my settlement with Pancho Cueto." His very careless confidence gave Rosa courage.

XII

WHEN THE WORLD RAN BACKWARD

ESTÉBAN went about his plan of destroying Pancho Cueto with youthful energy and zest. First he secured, at some pains, a half-stick of dynamite, a cap and fuse, and a gallon or more of kerosene; then he assembled his followers and led them once again into the San Juan.

This time the ride to La Joya was longer than before, and since every member of the little band was proscribed, Estéban insisted upon the greatest caution. But there was little need of especial care, for the country was already depopulated, as a result of Weyler's proclamation. Fields were empty, houses silent; no living creatures stirred, except in the tree-tops, and the very birds seemed frightened, subdued. It struck young Varona queerly. It was as if the whole land was in mourning; he saw nothing but blackbirds, somber-hued vultures, dismal Judea-birds with their ebony plumage and yellow beaks. Far up the valley a funeral pall of smoke hung in the sky itself; that was where the Spaniards were burning the houses of those too slow in obeying the order of concentration.

La Joya, however, was still tenanted when early in the evening its rightful owner arrived; the house and some of its outbuildings showed lights. Estéban concealed his men. While the horses cropped and the negroes rested he fitted fuse and cap to his precious piece of dynamite. It was likely, he thought, that Cueto had provided himself

with a body-guard, and knowing the plantation house as he did, he had no intention of battering weakly at its stout ironwood door while his quarry took fright and slipped away.

Now while Estéban was thus busied, Pancho Cueto was entertaining an unwelcome guest. In the late afternoon he had been surprised by the visit of a dozen or more Volunteers, and inasmuch as his relations with their colonel had been none of the friendliest since that ill-starred expedition into the Yumuri, he had felt a chill of apprehension on seeing the redoubtable Cobo himself at their head.

The colonel had explained that he was returning from a trip up the San Juan, taken for the purpose of rounding up those inhabitants who had been dilatory in obeying the new orders from Havana. That smoke to the southward was from fires of his kindling: he had burned a good many crops and houses and punished a good many people, and since this was exactly the sort of task he liked he was in no unpleasant mood. He had demanded of Cueto lodging for himself and his troop, announcing that a part of his command was somewhere behind and would rejoin him later in the night.

Cueto had welcomed his visitor in all humility; he put up the soldiers in the *bate* of the sugar-mill, and then installed Cobo in his best room, after which he ransacked the house for food and drink and tobacco.

Later he and the colonel sat long over their supper, for the latter's exultant humor continued. Cobo, it transpired, was delighted with the new captain-general, a man of blood and iron, a man after his own heart. This Weyler, he predicted, would put an end to the insurrection; there would be no more of Campos's weak, merciful methods, which were, in reality, nothing less than encouragement to revolt. Cueto, of course, agreed.

"We're sweeping the country as with a broom, and

already Matanzas is bulging with refugees," the officer told him. "They call themselves pacificos, but they carry information and aid our enemies. We'll have no more of that."

"Will it not be a great expense to feed so many people?" Cueto ventured.

"Let them feed themselves. Is it our fault that they make such measures necessary? By no means. Once we have them safe, we shall exterminate all whom we encounter in the country." The speaker drank deeply of Cueto's good wine and smacked his lips. "It's the kind of work I like. Extermination! They have had their warning. From now on we shall spare neither man, woman, nor child. The men are traitors, the women breed, and the children grow up."

Cueto nodded his complete approval of this program. "Oh, decidedly," said he. "This spirit of violence must be stamped out or none of us will be safe. Let me tell you I myself live in constant dread of that young villain, Varona. I—hope you haven't forgotten him."

"Forgotten him?" Colonel Cobo fingered a lately healed scar which further disfigured his ugly face, then he cursed frightfully. "It's by God's mercy alone that I'm alive to-night. And I haven't forgotten the girl, either. She'll have to come in, along with the others. The boy may stay out, but she can't." He licked his lips. "Wait until I have finished with this valley. I'll drive the Yumuri next, as a hunter drives a thicket for his game, and nothing will slip through."

His thoughts once turned upon Rosa, the colonel could talk of little else, and Cueto realized that the girl had indeed made a deep impression upon him. The overseer was well pleased, and when Cobo finally took himself off to bed he followed in better spirits than he had enjoyed for some time. For one thing, it was agreeable to look forward to a night of undisturbed repose. Pancho's ap-

prehensions had fattened upon themselves, and he had been living of late in a nightmare of terror.

But it seemed to him that he had barely closed his eyes when he was awakened by a tremendous vibration and found himself in the center of the floor, undecided whether he had been hurled from his bed or whether he had leaped thither. Still in a daze, he heard a shout from the direction of Cobo's room, then a din of other voices, followed by a rush of feet; the next instant his door was flung back and he saw, by the light of high-held torches, Estéban Varona and a ragged rabble of black men. Cueto knew that he faced death. He uttered a shrill scream of terror, and, seizing the revolver which was always close at his hand, he fired blindly. Then his foes were upon him. What happened thereafter took but an instant. He dodged a blow from Estéban's clubbed rifle only to behold the flash of a machete. Crying out again, he tried to guard himself from the descending blade, but too late; the sound of his hoarse terror died in his throat, half born.

"Quick! Soak the bed with oil and fire it," Estéban directed; then he ran out into the hall to investigate that other shouting. He found the chamber whence it issued and tried to smash the door; but at the second blow he heard a gun-shot from within and the wood splintered outward almost into his face. Simultaneously, from somewhere outside the house, arose the notes of a Spanish bugle-call.

Young Varona waited to hear no more. Nor did his men; realizing the peril into which they had been led, they bolted from the house as fast as they could go. There was no need for questions; from the direction of the sugar-mill came bellowed orders and the sound of men shouting to their horses. Evidently those were troops—and trained troops, too, for they took no time to saddle; they were up and mounted almost before the marauders

had gained the backs of their own animals. There was no opportunity to choose a retreat across the fields; Estéban spurred down the driveway toward the main *calzada*, yelling to his men to follow him.

The approach to La Joya was by way of a notable avenue, perhaps a half-mile in length, and bordered by tall, even rows of royal palms. These stately trees shaded the avenue by day and lent it a cavern-like gloom by night. Near the public causeway the road was cut through a bit of rising ground, and was walled by steep banks overgrown with vines.

Into the black tunnel formed by the palms the fugitives plunged, with the clatter of hoofs close behind them. Those of the Volunteers who pressed them hardest began to shoot wildly, for this typically Cuban refusal to stand ground enraged them beyond measure.

Estéban's party would doubtless have made good their escape had it not been for that other *guerrillero* returning from its raid; but, as it happened, the two forces met in the sunken road. Nothing but the darkness and the headlong approach of the fleeing men saved them from immediate destruction, for the collision occurred between banks too steep for a horse to climb, and with that yelling pack too close behind to permit of retreat.

Instantly there began a blind battle in these desperately cramped quarters. After the first moment or two friend and foe were indistinguishable and the men of both parties began firing or thrusting at whatever loomed nearest out of the gloom. The narrow ravine quickly became a place of utter confusion, a volcano of blasphemies, a press of jostling, plunging, struggling bodies. Horses reared and bit at one another. Riders fought stirrup to stirrup with clubbed rifles and machetes; saddles were emptied and the terrified horses bolted. Some of them lunged up the banks, only to tumble down again, their threshing limbs and sharp-shod hoofs working

more havoc than blows from old-time battle-hammers. Meanwhile those of Cobo's men who had ridden out from the sugar-mill naturally attributed this new uproar to a stand of their enemies, and began to rake the road with rifle fire; then, in obedience to the commands of their half-clad colonel, they charged. A moment and they were fighting hand to hand with their returning comrades. Spaniard clashed with Spaniard, and somewhere in the mêlée the six marauders battled for their lives.

Of course, after the first moment of conflict, Estéban had not been able to exert the least control over his men; in fact, he could not make himself heard. Nor could he spare the breath to shout; he was too desperately engaged. When the full truth of the situation dawned upon him he gave up hope for his life and at first merely strove to wreak such havoc as he could. Yet while some of his faculties were completely numbed in the stress of that white-hot moment, others remained singularly clear. The shock of his surprise, the imminence of his peril, rendered him dead to any emotion save dismay, and yet, strangely enough, he remembered Rosa's pressing need for him and, more for her sake than for his own, fought to extricate himself from the confusion. His rifle was empty, he had its hot barrel in his hands; he dimly distinguished Asensio wielding his machete. Then he found himself down and half stunned. He was running here and there to avoid lunging horses; he was tripping and falling, but meanwhile, as opportunity offered, he continued to use his clubbed weapon. Something smote him heavily, at last—whether a hoof or a gun-stock he could not tell—and next he was on all-fours, trying to drag himself out of this rat-pit. But his limbs were queerly rebellious, and he was sick; he had never experienced anything quite like this and he thought he must be wounded. It greatly surprised him to find that he could struggle upward through the brambles, even though it was hard

work. Men were fighting all around and below him, meanwhile, and he wondered vaguely what made them kill one another when he and his negroes were all dead or dying. It seemed very strange—of a piece with the general unreality of things—and it troubled him not a little.

At last he gained the top of the bank and managed to assume an upright position, clinging to the bole of a palm-tree. One of his arms was useless, he discovered, and he realized with a curious shock that it was broken. He was bleeding, too, from more than one wound, but he could walk, after a fashion.

He was inclined to stay and finish the fight, but he recollected that Rosa would be waiting for him and that he must go to her, and so he set out across the fields, staggering through the charred cane stubble. The night was not so black as it had been, and this puzzled him until he saw that the plantation house was ablaze. Flames were belching from its windows, casting abroad a lurid radiance; and remembering Pancho Cueto, Estéban laughed.

By and by, after he was well away, his numbness passed and he began to suffer excruciating pain. The pain had been there all the time, so it seemed; he was simply gaining the capacity to feel it. He was ready to die now, he was so ill; moreover, his left arm dangled and got in his way. Only that subconscious realization of the necessity to keep going for Rosa's sake sustained him.

After a while he found himself on a forest trail; then he came to other fields and labored across them. Fortune finally led his feet down into a creek-bed, and he drank greedily, sitting upon a stone and scooping the water up in his one useful hand. He was a long time in quenching his thirst, and a longer time in getting up, but he finally managed this, and he succeeded thereafter in keeping on his feet. Daylight came at last to show him his way.

More than once he paused, alarmed, at voices in the woods, only to find that the sounds issued from his own throat.

It had grown very hot now, so hot that heat-waves obscured his vision and caused the most absurd forms to take shape. He began to hunt aimlessly for water, but there was none. Evidently this heat had parched the land, dried up the streams, and set the stones afire. It was incredible, but true.

Estéban reasoned that he must be near home by this time, for he had been traveling for days—for years. The country, indeed, was altogether unfamiliar; he could not recall ever having seen the path he trod, but for that matter everything was strange. In the first place he knew that he was going west, and yet the morning sun persisted in beating hotly into his face! That alone convinced him that things had gone awry with the world. He could remember a great convulsion of some sort, but just what it was he had no clear idea! Evidently, though, it had been sufficient to change the rotation of the earth. Yes, that was it; the earth was running backward upon its axis; he could actually feel it whirling under his feet. No wonder his journey seemed so long. He was laboring over a gigantic treadmill, balancing like an equilibrist upon a revolving sphere. Well, it was a simple matter to stop walking, sit down, and allow himself to be spun backward around to the place where Rosa was waiting. He pondered this idea for some time, until its absurdity became apparent. Undoubtedly he must be going out of his head; he saw that it was necessary to keep walking until the back-spin of that treadmill brought Rosa to him.

But the time came when he could walk no farther. He tried repeatedly and failed, and meanwhile the earth spun even more rapidly, threatening to whirl him off into space. It was a terrible sensation; he lay down and hugged the

ground, clinging to roots and sobbing weakly. Rosa, he knew, was just around the next bend in the trail; he called to her, but she did not answer, and he dared not attempt to creep forward because his grip was failing. He could feel his fingers slipping—slipping. It was agony. He summoned his last atom of determination, but to no avail. He gave up finally, and felt himself propelled dizzily outward into immeasurable voids. His last thought, as he went whirling end over end through space, was of his sister. She would never know how hard he had tried to reach her.

XIII

CAPITULATION

LATE on the second day after the battle Asensio returned to his *bohio*. Rosa and Evangelina, already frantic at the delay, heard him crying to them while he was still hidden in the woods, and knew that the worst had happened. There was little need for him to tell his story, for he was weaponless, stained, and bloody. He had crossed the hills on foot after a miraculous escape from that ravine of death. Of his companions he knew nothing whatever; the mention of Estéban's name caused him to beat his breast and cry aloud. He was weak and feverish, and his incoherent story of the midnight encounter was so highly colored that Rosa nearly swooned with horror.

The girl stood swaying while he told how the night had betrayed them, how he had wrought incredible feats of valor before the shifting tide of battle had spewed him out the end of the sunken road and left him half dead in the grass. Asensio had lain there until, finding himself growing stronger, he had burrowed into a tangle of vines at the foot of a wall, where he had remained until the fighting ceased. When the Spaniards had finally discovered their mistake and had ceased riding one another down, when lights came and he heard Colonel Cobo cursing them like one insane, he had wriggled away, crossed the *calzada*, and hidden in the woods until dawn. He had been walking ever since; he had come home to die.

Rosa heard only parts of the story, for her mind was

numbed, her heart frozen. Her emotion was too deep for tears, it paralyzed her for the time being; she merely stood staring, her dark eyes glazed, her ashen lips apart. Finally something snapped, and she knew nothing more until hours afterward, when she found herself upon her comfortless bed with Evangelina bending over her. All night she had lain inert, in a merciful stupor; it was not until the next morning that she gradually came out of her coma.

Then it was that the negress was really alarmed, fearing that if the girl did rally her mind would be affected. But Rosa was young and, despite her fragility of form, she was strong—too strong, it seemed to her, and possessed of too deep a capacity for suffering. How she ever survived those next few days, days when she prayed hourly to die, was a mystery. And when she found that she could at last shed tears, what agony! The bond between her and Estéban had been stronger than usually exists between sister and brother; he had been her other self; in him she had centered her love, her pride, her ambition. The two had never quarreled; no angry word had ever passed between them: their mutual understanding, moreover, had been almost more than human, and where the one was concerned the other had been utterly unselfish. To lose Estéban, therefore, split the girl's soul and heart asunder; she felt that she could not stand without him. Born into the world at the same hour, welded into unity by their mother's supreme pain, the boy and girl were of the same flesh and spirit; they were animated by the same life-current. Never had the one been ill but that the other had suffered corresponding symptoms; never had the one been sad or gay but that the other had felt a like reaction. Personalities so closely knit together are not uncommon, and to sever them is often dangerous.

Into Rosa's life, however, there had come one interest which she could not share with her twin—that was her

love for O'Reilly. Spanish-reared women, as a rule, do not play with love; when it comes they welcome it, even though it be that first infatuation so often scorned by older, colder people. So it was with Rosa Varona. Whatever might have been the true nature of her first feeling for the Irish-American, suffering and meditation had deepened and strengthened it into a mature and genuine passion. As the wise men of old found wisdom in cave or desert, so Rosa in her solitude had learned the truth about herself. Now, in the hour of her extremity, thoughts of O'Reilly acted as a potent medicine. Her hungry yearning for him and her faith in his coming stimulated her desire to live, and so aided her recovery.

The day arrived when her brain was normal and when she could creep about the hut. But she was only the ghost of the girl she had been; she seldom spoke, and she never smiled. She sat for hours staring out into the sunshine, and when she found tears upon her cheeks she was surprised, for it seemed to her that she must long ago have shed the very last.

Asensio, likewise recovered, but he, too, was sadly changed. There was no longer any martial spirit in him; he feared the Spaniards, and tales of their atrocities cowed him.

Then Cobo came into the Yumuri. The valley, already well-nigh deserted, was filled to the brim with smoke from burning fields and houses, and through it the sun showed like a copper shield. Refugees passed the *bohio*, bound farther into the hills, and Asensio told the two women that he and they must also go. So the three gathered up what few things they could carry on their backs and fled.

They did not stop until they had gained the fastnesses of the *Pan de Matanzas*. Here they built a shelter and again took up the problem of living, which was now more difficult than ever.

Asensio would not have been greatly inconvenienced by the change had he been alone, for certain fruits grew wild in the forests, and the earth, where the Spaniards had not trod, was full of roots upon which a creature of his primitive habits could have managed to live. But hampered as he was by two women, one of whom was as delicate as a flower, Asensio found his task extremely difficult. And it grew daily more difficult; for there were other people here in the woods, and, moreover, the country round about was being steadily scoured by the enemy, who had orders to destroy every living, growing thing that was capable of sustaining human life. Stock was butchered and left to rot, trees were cut down, root-fields burned. Weyler's policy of frightfulness was in full sway, and starvation was driving its reluctant victims into his net. Meanwhile roving bands of guerrillas searched out and killed the stronger and the more tenacious families.

The *Pan de Matanzas*, so called because of its resemblance to a mighty loaf of bread, became a mockery to the hungry people cowering in its shelter. Bread! Rosa Varona could not remember when she had last tasted such a luxury. Raw cane, cocoanuts, the tasteless *fruita bomba*, roots, the pith from palm tops, these were her articles of diet, and she did not thrive upon them. She was always more or less hungry. She was ragged, too, and she shivered miserably through the long, chill nights. Rosa could measure the change in her appearance only by studying her reflection from the surface of the spring where she drew water, but she could see that she had become very thin, and she judged that the color had entirely gone from her cheeks. It saddened her, for O'Reilly's sake.

Time came when Asensio spoke of giving up the struggle and going in. They were gradually starving, he said, and Rosa was ill; the risk of discovery was ever present. It was better to go while they had the strength than slowly

but surely to perish here. He had heard that there were twenty thousand *reconcentrados* in Matanzas; in such a crowd they could easily manage to hide themselves; they would at least be fed along with the others.

No one had told Asensio that the Government was leaving its prisoners to shift for themselves, supplying them with not a pound of food nor a square inch of shelter.

Evangelina at first demurred to this idea, declaring that Rosa would never be allowed to reach the city, since the roads were patrolled by lawless bands of troops. Nevertheless her husband continued to argue. Rosa herself took no part in the discussion, for it did not greatly matter to her whether she stayed or went.

Misery bred desperation at last; Evangelina's courage failed her, and she allowed herself to be won over. She began her preparations by disguising Rosa. Gathering herbs and berries, she made a stain with which she colored the girl's face and body, then she sewed a bundle of leaves into the back of Rosa's waist so that when the latter stooped her shoulders and walked with a stick her appearance of deformity was complete.

On the night before their departure Rosa Varona prayed long and earnestly, asking little for herself, but much for the two black people who had suffered so much for her. She prayed also that O'Reilly would come before it was too late.

XIV

A WOMAN WITH A MISSION

WITHIN a few hours after O'Reilly's return to New York he telephoned to Felipe Alvarado, explaining briefly the disastrous failure of his Cuban trip.

"I feared as much," the doctor told him. "You were lucky to escape with your life."

"Well, I'm going back."

"Of course; but have you made any plans?"

"Not yet. I dare say I'll have to join some filibustering outfit. Won't you intercede for me with the Junta? They're constantly sending parties."

"Um-m! not quite so often as that." Alvarado was silent for a moment; then he said: "Dine with me tonight and we'll talk it over. I'm eager for news of my brothers and—there is some one I wish you to meet. She is interested in our cause."

"'She'? A woman?"

"Yes, and an unusual woman. She has contributed liberally to our cause. I would like you to meet her."

"Very well; but I've only one suit of clothes, and it looks as if I'd slept in it."

"Oh, bother the clothes!" laughed the physician. "I've given most of mine to my destitute countrymen. Don't expect too much to eat, either; every extra dollar, you know, goes the same way as my extra trousers. It will be a sort of patriotic 'poverty party.' Come at seven, please."

"Dining out, eh? Lucky devil!" said Leslie Branch when he had learned of his companion's invitation. "And to meet a philanthropic old lady! Gee! Maybe she'll offer to adopt you. Who knows?"

"I wish you'd offer to lend me a clean shirt."

"I'll do it," readily agreed the other. "I'll stake you to my last one. But keep it clean! Have a care for the cuffs—a little inadvertency with the soup may ruin my prospects for a job. You understand, don't you, that our next meal after this one may depend upon this shirt's prosperous appearance?" Branch dove into his bag and emerged with a stiffly laundered shirt done up in a Cuban newspaper. He unwrapped the garment and gazed fondly upon it, murmuring, "'Tis a pretty thing, is it not?" His exertions had brought on a violent coughing-spell, which left him weak and gasping; but when he had regained his breath he went on in the same key: "Again I solemnly warn you that this spotless bosom is our bulwark against poverty. One stain may cut down my space rates; editors are an infernally fastidious lot. Fortunately they want facts about the war in Cuba, and I'm full of 'em: I've fought in the trenches and heard the song of grape and canister—"

"Grape-fruit and canned goods, you mean," O'Reilly grinned.

"Well, I shall write with both in mind. The hope of one will stir memories of the other. And who is there to dispute me? At least I know what a battle should be like, and I shall thrill my readers with imaginary combats."

O'Reilly eyed the speaker with appreciation. On the way north he had learned to know Leslie Branch and to like him, for he had discovered that the man possessed a rare and pleasing peculiarity of disposition. Ordinarily Branch was bitter, irritable, pessimistic; but when his luck was worst and his fortunes lowest he brightened up. It seemed that he reacted naturally, automatically, against

misfortune. Certainly his and O'Reilly's plight upon leaving Cuba had been sufficiently unpleasant, for they were almost penniless, and the invalid, moreover, knew that he was facing a probably fatal climate; nevertheless, once they were at sea, he had ceased his grumbling, and had surprised his traveling-companion by assuming a genuinely cheerful mien. Even yet O'Reilly was not over his amazement; he could not make up his mind whether the man was animated by desperate courage or merely by hopeless resignation. But whatever the truth, the effect of this typical perversity had been most agreeable. And when Leslie cheerfully volunteered to share the proceeds of his newspaper work during their stay in New York, thus enabling his friend to seize the first chance of returning to Cuba, Johnnie's affection for him was cemented. But Branch's very cheerfulness worried him; it seemed to betoken that the fellow was sicker than he would confess.

That evening O'Reilly anticipated his dinner engagement by a few moments in order to have a word alone with Alvarado.

"I've seen Enriquez," he told the doctor, "but he won't promise to send me through. He says the Junta is besieged by fellows who want to fight for Cuba—and of course I don't. When I appealed in Rosa's name he told me, truthfully enough, I dare say, that there are thousands of Cuban women as badly in need of succor as she. He says this is no time for private considerations."

"Quite so!" the doctor agreed. "We hear frightful stories about this new concentration policy. I—can't believe them."

"Oh, I guess they are true; it is the more reason why I must get back at once," O'Reilly said, earnestly.

"This lady who is coming here to-night has influence with Enriquez. You remember I told you that she has contributed liberally. She might help you."

"I'll implore her to put in a word for me. Who is she?"

"Well, she's my pet nurse—"

"A nurse!" O'Reilly's eyes opened wide. "A nurse, with *money!* I didn't know there was such a thing."

"Neither did I. They're rarer even than rich doctors," Alvarado acknowledged. "But, you see, nursing is merely Miss Evans's avocation. She's one of the few wealthy women I know who have real ideals, and live up to them."

"Oh, she has a 'mission'!" Johnnie's interest in Doctor Alvarado's other guest suddenly fell away, and his tone indicated as much. As the doctor was about to reply the ringing of the door-bell summoned him away.

O'Reilly had met women with ideals, with purposes, with avocations, and his opinion of them was low. Women who had "missions" were always tiresome, he had discovered. This one, it appeared, was unusual only in that she had adopted a particularly exacting form of charitable work. Nursing, even as a rich woman's diversion, must be anything but agreeable. O'Reilly pictured this Evans person in his mind—a large, plain, elderly creature, obsessed with impractical ideas of uplifting the masses! She would undoubtedly bore him stiff with stories of her work: she would reproach him with neglect of his duties to the suffering. Johnnie was too poor to be charitable and too deeply engrossed at the moment with his own troubles to care anything whatever about the "masses."

And she was a "miss." That meant that she wore thick glasses and probably kept cats.

A ringing laugh from the cramped hallway interrupted these reflections; then a moment later Doctor Alvarado was introducing O'Reilly to a young woman so completely out of the picture, so utterly the opposite of his preconceived notions, that he was momentarily at a loss. Johnnie found himself looking into a pair of frank gray eyes, and felt his hand seized by a firm, almost masculine grasp. Miss Evans, according to his first dazzling impression, was

about the most fetching creature he had ever seen and about the last person by whom any young man could be bored. If she kept cats they must be pedigreed Persian cats, and well worth keeping, Johnnie decided. The girl —and she was a girl—had brought into the room an electric vitality, a breeziness hard to describe. Her eyes were humorous and intelligent; her teeth, which she seemed always ready to show in a friendly, generous smile, were strong and white and sparkling. Altogether she was such a vision of healthy, unaffected, and smartly gotten-up young womanhood that O'Reilly could only stammer his acknowledgment of the introduction, inwardly berating himself for his awkwardness. He was aware of Alvarado's amusement, and this added to his embarrassment.

"The doctor has told me all about you." Miss Evans addressed Johnnie over her shoulder as she laid off her furs and a stylish little turban hat. "I'm dying to hear what happened on your trip."

"So am I," confessed Alvarado. "You know, Mr. O'Reilly has seen my brothers."

"You men must go right ahead and talk as if I weren't here. I won't interrupt, except with a few vivas or carambas or— What are some other lady-like Spanish exclamations?"

"There aren't very many," Johnnie acknowledged. "I always try to swear in English."

Alvarado placed an affectionate hand upon Miss Evans's shoulder. "O'Reilly, this girl has done more for Cuba than any of us. She has spent a small fortune for medical supplies," said he.

"Those poor men must live on quinine," the girl exclaimed. "Any one who can bear to take the stuff ought to have all he wants. I've a perfect passion for giving pills."

"Oh, you may joke about it. All the same, if others would make the same sacrifice—"

Miss Evans interrupted breezily: "It wasn't any sacrifice at all. That's the worst of it. The salve I bought was really for my conscience, if you must know. I squander altogether too much on myself." Then, turning to O'Reilly, "I love extravagance, don't you?"

"Dearly! It's my one unconquerable vice," he told her. He thought grimly of the four dollars in his pocket which represented his and Leslie Branch's total wealth, but it seemed to him that he was called upon to agree with anything Miss Evans might choose to say.

O'Reilly liked this girl. He had liked her the instant she favored him with her friendly smile, and so, trusting fatuously to his masculine powers of observation, he tried to analyze her. He could not guess her age, for an expensive ladies' tailor can baffle the most discriminating eye. Certainly, however, she was not too old—he had an idea that she would tell him her exact age if he asked her. While he could not call her beautiful, she was something immensely better—she was alive, human, interesting, and interested. The fact that she did not take her "mission" over-seriously proved that she was also sensible beyond most women. Yes, that was it, Norine Evans was a perfectly sensible, unspoiled young person, who showed the admirable effects of clean living and clean thinking coupled with a normal, sturdy constitution. O'Reilly told himself that here was a girl who could pour tea, nurse a sick man, or throw a baseball.

And she was as good as her promise. She did not interrupt when, during dinner, Alvarado led Johnnie to talk about his latest experience in Cuba, but, on the contrary, her unflagging interest induced O'Reilly to address his talk more often to her than to the doctor. He soon discovered that she understood the Cuban situation as well as or better than he, and that her sympathies were keen. When she did speak it was to ask intelligent questions, some of which, by the way, it taxed O'Reilly's wits to

answer satisfactorily. Heretofore, Johnnie had looked upon the war primarily as an unfortunate condition of affairs which had played the mischief with his own personal fortunes; he had not allowed himself to be very deeply affected by the rights or the wrongs of either party. But Norine Evans took a much deeper and broader view of the matter. She was genuinely moved by the gallant struggle of the Cuban people, and when the dinner was over she exploded a surprise which left both men speechless.

"This settles it with me," she announced. "I'm going down there."

Alvarado stared at her for a moment. "My dear—" he began.

But she warned him: "Don't argue with me. You know I detest arguments. I've been thinking about it for some time, and—"

"It is quite impossible," the doctor declared, firmly; and O'Reilly agreed.

"Of course you could go to Havana," said the latter, "but you wouldn't be allowed to see anything."

"I'm going right to the Insurrectos with you."

"*With me!*" O'Reilly could not conceal his lack of enthusiasm. "I don't know that the Junta will take me."

"They will if I ask them."

Alvarado inquired, "What ever put such a ridiculous idea into your head?"

The girl laughed. "It's the only kind of ideas I have. But there are ten thousand reasons why I want to go. In the first place, I fairly itch to give pills. You say the rebels have no hospitals, no nurses—"

"We do the best we can, with our equipment."

"Well, I'll supply better equipment, and I'll handle it myself. I'm in earnest. You sha'n't stop me."

O'Reilly was uncomfortably aware of the speaker's determination; protests had no effect upon her; her clear

cheeks had flushed, her eyes were dancing. Evidently here was a girl who did very much as she chose.

"You don't realize what you are saying," he told her, gravely. "You'd have to go as a filibuster, on some decrepit, unseaworthy freighter loaded to the guards and crowded with men of all sorts. It's dangerous business, running the Spanish blockade. If captured you would be treated just like the rest of us."

"Lovely! We'd land in small boats some dark night. Maybe we'd have a fight!"

"And if you got through, what then? Life in a bark hut, with nothing to eat. Bugs! Snakes! Hardships!"

"That decides me. I eat too much—Doctor Alvarado tells me I do. I adore huts, and I don't seriously object to insects."

The physician stirred uneasily. "It's utterly absurd," he expostulated. "Some women might do it, but you're not the sort. You are—pardon me—a most attractive young person. You'd be thrown among rough men."

"Mr. O'Reilly will look out for me. But for that matter I can take care of myself. Oh, it's of no use trying to discourage me. I always have my own way; I'm completely spoiled."

"Your family will never consent," O'Reilly ventured; whereupon Miss Evans laughed.

"I haven't such a thing. I'm alone and unencumbered. No girl was ever so fortunate. But wait—I'll settle this whole thing in a minute." She quitted the table, ran to Alvarado's telephone, and called a number.

"She's after Enriquez," groaned the physician. "He's weak; he can't refuse her anything."

"I don't want a woman on my hands," O'Reilly whispered, fiercely. "Suppose she got sick? Good Lord! I'd have to *nurse* her." He wiped a sudden moisture from his brow.

"Oh, she won't get sick. She'll probably nurse you—

and—and all the other men. You'll like it, too, and you will all fall in love with her—everybody does—and start fighting among yourselves. There! She has Enriquez. Listen."

Johnnie shivered apprehensively at the directness with which Miss Evans put her request. "You understand, I want to go and see for myself," she was saying. "If you need medicines I'll give them—bushels of the nastiest stuff I can buy. I'll organize a field hospital. . . . Oh, very well, call it a bribe, if you like. Anyhow, I've fully determined to go, and Mr. O'Reilly has volunteered to take care of me. He's charmed with the idea." Miss Evans giggled. "That means you'll have to take him along, too."

There followed a pause during which the two men exchanged dismayed glances.

"She doesn't seem to care what she says," O'Reilly murmured. "But—I'll put a flea in Enriquez's ear."

"Put it in writing, please." There was another wait. "Now read it to me. . . . Good!" Miss Evans fairly purred over the telephone. "Send it to me by messenger right away; that's a dear. I'm at Doctor Alvarado's house, and he's beside himself with joy. Thanks, awfully. You're so nice." A moment, and she was back in the dining-room facing her two friends—a picture of triumph. "You have nothing more to say about it," she gloated. "'The Provisional Government of Cuba, through its New York representatives, extends to Miss Norine Evans an invitation to visit its temporary headquarters in the Sierra de—something-or-other, and deems it an honor to have her as its guest so long as she wishes to remain there. It requests that all military and civil officers afford her every safety and convenience within their power.' That's practically what Mr. Enriquez read to me. In fifteen minutes it will be here in black and white. Now then, let's celebrate."

She executed a dance step, pirouetted around the room, then plumped herself down into her chair. She rattled her cup and saucer noisily, crying, "Fill them up, Doctor Gloom. Let's drink to Cuba Libre."

Johnnie managed to smile as he raised his demi-tasse. "Here's to my success as a chaperon," said he. "I'm disliked by the Spaniards, and now the Cubans will hate me. I can see happy days ahead."

XV

FILIBUSTERS

LESLIE BRANCH was asleep when O'Reilly returned to their room, but he awoke sufficiently to listen to the latter's breathless account of the dinner-party.

"I'm rattled," Johnnie confessed. "Why, that girl just bounced right into the middle of everything, and—and I can't bounce her out again."

"You say she's young, and *pretty*, and—*rich?*" Leslie was incredulous.

"Y-yes! All of that."

"Um-m! Doctor Alvarado must mix a good cocktail."

"Why?"

"Because you're drunk and delirious. They don't come that way, my boy. When they're rich they're old and ugly."

"I tell you this girl is young and—stunning."

"Of course she is," Branch agreed, soothingly. "Now go to sleep and don't think any more about her, there's a good boy! Everything will be all right in the morning. Perhaps it never happened; perhaps you didn't meet any woman at all." The speaker yawned and turned over.

"Don't be an ass," Johnnie cried, impatiently. "What are we going to do with a woman on our hands?"

"*We?* Don't divide her with me. What are *you* going to do? The truth is plain, this Miss Evans is in love with you and you don't know it. She sees in you her soul mate. Well, if you don't want her, I want her. I'll eat

her medicine. I'll even—marry the poor old soul, if she's rich."

O'Reilly arose early the next morning and hurried down to the office of the Junta, hoping that he could convince Mr. Enriquez of the folly of allowing Norine Evans to have her way. By the light of day Miss Evans's project seemed more hare-brained than ever, and he suspected that Enriquez had acquiesced in it only because of a natural inability to refuse anything to a pretty woman—that was typically Cuban. But his respect for Miss Evans's energy and initiative deepened when, on arriving at 56 New Street, he discovered that she had forestalled him and was even then closeted with the man he had come to see. Johnnie waited uneasily; he was dismayed when the girl finally appeared, with Enriquez in tow, for the man's face was radiant.

"It's all settled," she announced, at sight of O'Reilly. "I've speeded them up."

"You're an early riser," the latter remarked. "I hardly expected—"

Enriquez broke in. "Such enthusiasm! Such ardor! She whirls a person off his feet."

"It seems that the Junta lacks money for another expedition, so I've made up the deficit. We'll be off in a week."

"Really? Then you're actually—going?"

"Of course."

"It was like a gift from Heaven," Enriquez cried. "Our last embarrassment is removed, and—"

But Johnnie interrupted him. "You're crazy, both of you," he declared, irritably. "Cuba is no place for an American girl. I'm not thinking so much about the danger of capture on the way down as the hardship after she gets there and the fact that she will be thrown among all sorts of men."

The elder man lifted his head. "Every Cuban will

know who Miss Evans is, and what she has done for our cause. You do not seem to have a high regard for our chivalry, sir."

"There!" Norine was triumphant.

"There is bound to be some danger, of course," Enriquez continued, "for the coast is well patrolled; but once the expedition is landed, Miss Evans will be among friends. She will be as safe in our camps as if she were in her own home."

"Don't be hateful, and argumentative, or I'll begin to think you're a born chaperon," Miss Evans exclaimed. "Come! Make up your mind to endure me. And now you're going to help me buy my tropical outfit."

With a smile and a nod at Enriquez she took O'Reilly's arm and bore him away.

In spite of his panic-struck protestations that he knew less than nothing about woman's requirements, she led him up-town. And she kept him at her side all that morning while she made her purchases; then when she had loaded him down with parcels she invited him to take her to lunch. The girl was so keenly alive and so delighted with the prospect of adventure that Johnnie could not long remain displeased with her. She had an irresistible way about her, and he soon found himself sharing her good spirits. She had a healthy appetite, too; when O'Reilly set out for his lodgings after escorting her home he walked in order to save car fare. Clams, consommé, chicken salad, French pastry, and other extravagances had reduced his capital to zero.

The days of idle waiting that followed were trying, even to one of O'Reilly's philosophic habit of mind. He could learn nothing about the Junta's plans, and, owing to his complete uncertainty, he was unable to get work. Leslie Branch, too, failed to find steady employment, though he managed, by the sale of an occasional column, to keep them both from actual suffering. His cough,

meanwhile, grew worse day by day, for the spring was late and raw. As a result his spirits rose, and he became the best of all possible good companions. Johnnie, who was becoming constantly more fond of him, felt his anxiety increase in proportion to this improvement in mood; it seemed to him that Branch was on the very verge of a collapse.

At last there came a message which brought them great joy. Enriquez directed them to be in readiness to leave Jersey City at seven o'clock the following morning. Neither man slept much that night.

As they waited in the huge, barn-like station Enriquez appeared with Norine Evans upon his arm. The girl's color was high; she was tremulous with excitement. Leslie Branch, who saw her for the first time, emitted a low whistle of surprise.

"Glory be! That goddess!" he cried. "And I called her a 'poor old soul'!"

When Norine took his bony, bloodless hand in her warm grasp and flashed him her frank, friendly smile, he capitulated instantly. In hyperbolical terms he strove to voice his pleasure at the meeting; but he lost the thread of his thought and floundered so hopelessly among his words that Norine said, laughingly:

"Now, Mr. Branch, bold buccaneers don't make pretty speeches. Hitch up your belt and say, 'Hello, Norine!' I'll call you Leslie."

"Don't call me 'Leslie,'" he begged. "Call me often."

Then he beamed upon the others, as if this medieval pun were both startling and original. It was plain that he wholly and inanely approved of Norine Evans.

Enriquez was introducing a new-comer now, one Major Ramos, a square-jawed, forceful Cuban, who, it seemed, was to be in command of the expedition.

"My duties end here," Enriquez explained. "Major

Ramos will take charge of you, and you must do exactly as he directs. Ask no questions, for he won't answer them. Do you think you can follow instructions?"

"Certainly not. I sha'n't even try," Norine told him. "I'm fairly bursting with curiosity at this moment."

"Remember, Ramos, not a word."

"I promise," smiled the major.

"Good-by and good luck." Enriquez shook hands all around; then he bowed and kissed Miss Evans's fingers. "I shall pray that you escape all danger, señorita, and I shall see that Cuba remembers her debt to you."

When he had gone the three Americans followed their new guide through the iron gates.

Major Ramos proved that he knew how to obey orders even though the other members of his party did not. He remained utterly deaf to Miss Evans's entreaties that he let her know something about the plans of the expedition; he would not even tell her where he was taking her, where the other filibusters had assembled, or from what port their ship would sail. He did go so far, however, as to explain that an inkling of the Junta's plans had leaked out, and that determined efforts to upset them were being made, efforts which necessitated the greatest care on his part. This, of course, whetted the girl's curiosity; but to her most artful queries he opposed a baffling silence. When Philadelphia, Washington, then Baltimore, and finally Richmond were left behind, Miss Evans was, in truth, ready to explode, and her two companions were in a similar frame of mind.

Major Ramos was not naturally a silent man; he had all the loquacity of the Latin, and all the Latin's appreciation of a pretty woman; he made no secret of the fact that his orders irked him. Despite his official reserve he proved himself a pleasant traveling-companion, and he talked freely on all but one subject. He played a good game of cards, too, and he devoted himself with admirable

courtesy to Norine's comfort. It was not until the train was approaching Charleston that he finally announced:

"Now then, my first command. This is the end of our journey; the other members of the expedition are here. But I must ask you not to talk with them or with any strangers, for our friends are being watched by detectives in the employ of the Spanish minister at Washington and by United States deputy-marshals. One little indiscretion might ruin everything."

"Spies! Oh, goody!" cried Miss Evans.

"The local authorities intend to seize any vessel we try to sail on. We must be careful."

The hotel to which Major Ramos led his guests appeared to be well filled; there were many Cubans in the lobby, and the air was heavy with the aroma of their strong, black cigarettes. As the major entered they turned interested and expectant faces toward him and they eyed his companions with frank curiosity. Miss Evans became the target for more than one warmly admiring glance.

As for O'Reilly, the familiar odor of those Cuban cigarettes, the snatches of Spanish conversation which he overheard, awoke in him a great excitement; he realized with an odd thrill that these eager, dark-visaged men were now his friends and comrades, and that those Americans loitering watchfully among them were his enemies—the spies of whom Ramos had spoken. There were at least a score of the latter, and all were plainly stamped with the distinctive marks of their calling. That they, too, were interested in the latest arrivals was soon made evident by their efforts to get acquainted.

To Norine Evans it was all immensely exciting. The attention she evoked delighted her vastly, and she was almost offended when O'Reilly threatened one particularly forward sleuth with a thrashing, thereby ending her fun.

It was a strangely restless gathering. The Cubans sat

in groups or in pairs with their heads together, smoking furiously and whispering, pausing now and then to glare balefully at some detective who drew within ear-shot. Every hour increased the strain.

On the street it became known that a party of filibusters was in the city and curious townspeople came to investigate, while others journeyed to the water-front to stare at the big ocean-going tug which had slipped into the harbor on the evening previous. When they learned that she was none other than the *Dauntless*, that most famous of Cuban blockade-runners, and that "Dynamite Johnny" O'Brien himself was in command, interest grew. The exploits of that redoubtable mariner were familiar to the citizens of Charleston, and their sympathies were quite naturally with the cause he served; therefore they were disappointed to behold a revenue cutter at anchor close alongside the *Dauntless*. Her steam was up; she was ready for instant action; it seemed impossible for "Dynamite Johnny" to get his cargo and his passengers aboard under her very nose. Some imaginative person claimed to have a tip that the *Dauntless* intended to ram the revenue cutter, and a warning to that effect appeared in the evening paper, together with the rumor that a Spanish cruiser was waiting just outside the three-mile limit.

Charleston awoke with a start, and the Cuban patriots who found themselves the object of this sudden interest buzzed like flies. They muttered and whispered more mysteriously than ever, and consumed even greater quantities of tobacco. The detectives became painfully alert.

To O'Reilly and his two companions it seemed that the expedition had already failed. Through some blunder its plans had evidently become known, and all was ruined. That was the worst of these Cubans; they couldn't keep a secret. Branch stalked the hotel lobby like a restless wraith. O'Reilly was furious. Of the entire party Ramos alone maintained an unruffled pleasantry; he

spent the evening in Miss Evans's company, quite oblivious to the general feeling of dismay.

On the next afternoon word was quietly passed to get ready, and the filibusters, carrying their scant hand-baggage, began to leave the hotel in groups, followed, of course, by the watchful spies.

As the three Americans prepared for departure Norine whispered: "Listen! Everything is all right. We're not going aboard the *Dauntless* at all; she's here as a blind."

"Are you sure?" O'Reilly shot her a quick glance.

"Major Ramos himself gave that story to the newspapers; it's all a part of his plan. I promised not to tell, but—I just can't help myself. Gee! I'm having a good time."

Leslie Branch shook his head mournfully. "You may enjoy it, but I don't," he grumbled. "We'll end by being pinched, and that will finish me. One week in a damp cell, with my lungs—"

O'Reilly, whose spirits had risen magically, clapped him heartily on the back, crying: "Congratulations! You're feeling better."

"I never felt worse!" the other complained.

"Nonsense! That's the first kick you've made since we hit cold weather. By the time we reach Cuba you'll be nice and melancholy and your cough will be all gone."

Ramos led his three charges to the railroad station and into the rear coach of a south-bound train, where the other members of the expedition had already found seats. As they climbed aboard, a Secret Service agent essayed to follow them, but he was stopped by a brakeman, who said:

"You can't ride in here; this is a special car. Some sort of a picnic party. They're 'wops' or Greeks or something."

Other detectives who attempted to invade the privacy of that rear coach after the train had gotten under way

were also denied. Meanwhile, the filibusters cast restraint aside, and for the first time intermingled freely.

Evening came, then night, and still the party was jerked along at the tail of the train without a hint as to its destination. About midnight those who were not dozing noted that they had stopped at an obscure pine-woods junction, and that when the train got under way once more their own car did not move. The ruse was now apparent; owing to the lateness of the hour, it was doubtful if any one in the forward coaches was aware that the train was lighter by one car.

There was a brief delay; then a locomotive crept out from a siding, coupled up to the standing car, and drew it off upon another track. Soon the "excursion party" was being rushed swiftly toward the coast, some twenty miles away.

Major Ramos came down the aisle, laughing, and spoke to his American protégés.

"Well, what do you think of that, eh? Imagine the feelings of those good deputy-marshals when they wake up. I bet they'll rub their eyes."

Miss Evans bounced excitedly in her seat; she clapped her hands.

"You must have friends in high places," O'Reilly grinned, and the Cuban agreed.

"Yes, I purposely drew attention to us in Charleston, while our ship was loading. She's ready and waiting for us now; and by daylight we ought to be safely out to sea. Meanwhile the *Dauntless* has weighed anchor and is steaming north, followed, I hope, by all the revenue cutters hereabouts."

It was the darkest time of the night when the special train came to a stop at a bridge spanning one of the deep Southern rivers. In the stream below, dimly outlined in the gloom, lay the *Fair Play*, a small tramp steamer; her crew were up and awake. The new arrivals

were hurried aboard, and within a half-hour she was feeling her way seaward.

With daylight, caution gave way to haste, and the rusty little tramp began to drive forward for all she was worth. She cleared the three-mile limit safely and then turned south. Not a craft was in sight; not a smudge of smoke discolored the sky-line.

It had been a trying night for the filibusters, and when the low coast-line was dropped astern they began to think of sleep. Breakfast of a sort was served on deck, after which those favored ones who had berths sought them, while their less fortunate companions stretched out wherever they could find a place.

Johnnie O'Reilly was not one of those who slept; he was too much elated. Already he could see the hills of Cuba dozing behind their purple veils; in fancy he felt the fierce white heat from close-walled streets, and scented the odors of "mangly" swamps. He heard the ceaseless sighing of royal palms. How he had hungered for it all; how he had raged at his delays! Cuba's spell was upon him; he knew now that he loved the island, and that he would never feel at rest on other soil.

It had seemed so small a matter to return; it had seemed so easy to seek out Rosa and to save her! Yet the days had grown into weeks; the weeks had aged into months. Well, he had done his best; he had never rested from the moment of Rosa's first appeal. Her enemies had foiled him once, but there would be no turning back this time—rather a firing-squad or a dungeon in Cabanas than that.

O'Reilly had taken his bitter medicine as becomes a man—he had maintained a calm, if not a cheerful, front; but now that every throb of the propeller bore him closer to his heart's desire he felt a growing jubilation, a mounting restlessness that was hard to master. His pulse was pounding; his breath swelled in his lungs. Sleep? That was for those who merely risked their lives for

Cuba. Hunger? No food could satisfy a starving soul. Rest? He would never rest until he held Rosa Varona in his arms. This rusty, sluggish tub was standing still!

Into the midst of his preoccupation Norine Evans forced herself, announcing, breathlessly:

"Oh, but I'm excited! They're hoisting a cannon out of the hold and putting it together, so that we can fight if we have to."

"Now don't you wish you'd stayed at home?" O'Reilly smiled at her.

"Good heavens, no! I'm having the time of my life. I nearly died of curiosity at first—until I found Major Ramos's tongue."

"Hm-m! You found it, all right. He appears to be completely conquered."

"I-I'm afraid so," the girl acknowledged, with a little grimace. "You'd think he'd never seen a woman before. He's very—intense. Very!"

"You don't expect me, as your chaperon, to approve of your behavior? Why, you've been flirting outrageously."

"I had to flirt a little: I simply had to know what was going on. But—I fixed him."

"Indeed?"

"I couldn't let him spoil my fun, could I? Of course not. Well, I put a damper on him. I told him about you—about us."

O'Reilly was puzzled. "What do you mean?" he inquired.

"You won't be angry, will you? When he waxed romantic I told him he had come into my life too late. I confessed that I was in love with another man—with you." As her hearer drew back in dismay Miss Evans added, quickly, "Oh, don't be frightened; that isn't half—"

"Of course you're joking," Johnnie stammered.

"Indeed I'm not. I thought it would discourage him,

but—it didn't. So I told him a whopper. I said we were engaged." The speaker tittered. She was delighted with herself.

"Engaged? To be *married?*"

"Certainly! People aren't engaged to—to go fishing, are they? I had to tell him *something;* he was getting positively feverish. If he'd kept it up I'd have told him we were secretly married."

"This may be funny," the young man said, stiffly, "but I don't see it."

"Oh, don't look so glum! I'm not going to hold you to it, you know. Why"—Miss Evans's bantering manner ceased, and she said, earnestly: "Doctor Alvarado told me your story, and I think it is splendid. I'm going to help you find that little Rosa, if you'll let me. You were thinking about her when I came up, weren't you?"

Johnnie nodded.

"You—might talk to me about her, if you care to."

O'Reilly's voice was husky and low as he said: "I daren't trust myself. I'm afraid. She's so young, so sweet, so beautiful—and these are war-times. I'm almost afraid to think—"

Norine saw her companion's cheeks blanch slowly, saw his laughing eyes grow grave, saw the muscular brown hand upon the rail tighten until the knuckles were white; impulsively she laid her palm over his.

"Don't let yourself worry," she said. "If money would buy her safety you could have all that I have. Just be brave and true and patient, and you'll find her. I'm sure you will. And in the mean time don't mind my frivolity; it's just my way. You see this is my first taste of life, and it has gone to my head."

XVI

THE CITY AMONG THE LEAVES

THE night was moonless and warm. An impalpable haze dimmed the star-glow, only the diffused illumination of the open sea enabled the passengers of the *Fair Play* to identify that blacker darkness on the horizon ahead of them as land. The ship herself was no more than a formless blot stealing through the gloom, and save for the phosphorescence at bow and stern no light betrayed her presence, not even so much as the flare of a match or the coal from a cigar or cigarette. Orders of the strictest had been issued and the *expedicionarios*, gathered along the rails, were not inclined to disregard them, for only two nights before the *Fair Play*, in spite of every precaution, had shoved her nose fairly into a hornets' nest and had managed to escape only by virtue of the darkness and the speed of her engines.

She had approached within a mile or two of the prearranged landing-place when over the mangroves had flared the blinding white light of a Spanish patrol-boat; like a thief surprised at his work the tramp had turned tail and fled, never pausing until she lay safe among the Bahama Banks.

Now she was feeling her way back, some distance to the westward. Major Ramos was on the bridge with the captain. Two men were taking soundings in a blind search for that steep wall which forms the side of the old Bahama Channel. When the lead finally gave them

warning, the *Fair Play* lost her headway and came to a stop, rolling lazily; in the silence that ensued Leslie Branch's recurrent cough barked loudly.

"They're afraid to go closer, on account of the reef," O'Reilly explained to his companions.

"That must be it that I hear," Norine ventured. "Or maybe it's just the roaring in my ears."

"Probably the latter," said Branch. "I'm scared stiff. I don't like reefs. Are there any sharks in these waters?"

"Plenty."

"Well, I'm glad I'm thin," the sick man murmured.

Major Ramos spoke in a low tone from the darkness above, calling for a volunteer boat's crew to reconnoiter and to look for an opening through the reef. Before the words were out of his mouth O'Reilly had offered himself.

Ten minutes later he found himself at the steering-oar of one of the ship's life-boats, heading shoreward. A hundred yards, and the *Fair Play* was lost to view; but, keeping his face set toward that inky horizon, O'Reilly guided his boat perhaps a half-mile nearer before ordering his crew to cease rowing. Now through the stillness came a low, slow, pulsating whisper, the voice of the barrier reef.

The trade-winds had died with the sun, and only the gentlest ground-swell was running; nevertheless, when the boat drew farther in the sound increased alarmingly, and soon a white breaker streak showed dimly where the coral teeth of the reef bit through.

There was a long night's work ahead; time pressed, and so O'Reilly altered his course and cruised along outside the white water, urging his crew to lustier strokes. It was haphazard work, this search for an opening, and every hour of delay increased the danger of discovery.

A mile—two miles—it seemed like ten to the taut oarsmen, and then a black hiatus of still water showed in the

phosphorescent foam. O'Reilly explored it briefly; then he turned back toward the ship. When he had gone as far as he dared, he lit a lantern and, shielding its rays from the shore with his coat, flashed it seaward. After a short interval a dim red eye winked once out of the blackness. O'Reilly steered for it.

Soon he and his crew were aboard and the ship was groping her way toward the break in the reef. Meanwhile, her deck became a scene of feverish activity; out from her hold came cases of ammunition and medical supplies; the field-piece on the bow was hurriedly dismounted; the small boats, of which there were an extra number, were swung out, with the result that when the *Fair Play* had manœuvered as close as she dared everything was in readiness.

Many of these *expedicionarios* were professional men, clerks, cigar-makers, and the like; few of them had ever done hard manual labor; yet they fell to their tasks willingly enough. While they worked a close watch with night glasses was maintained from the bridge.

O'Reilly took the first load through the reef, and discharged it upon a sandy beach. No one seemed to know positively whether this was the mainland or some key; and there was no time for exploration; in either event, there was no choice of action. Every man tumbled overboard and waded ashore with a packing-case; he dropped this in the sand above high-tide mark, and then ran back for another. It was swift, hot work. From the darkness on each side came the sounds of other boat crews similarly engaged.

Johnnie was back alongside the ship and ready for a second cargo before the last tender had set out upon its first trip, and then for several hours this slavish activity continued. Some crews lost themselves in the gloom, fetched up on the reef, and were forced to dump their freight into the foam, trusting to salvage it when daylight

came. Every one was wet to the skin; bodies steamed in the heat; men who had pulled at oars until their hands were raw and bleeding cursed and groaned at their own fatigue. But there was little shirking; those whose strength completely failed them dropped in the sand and rested until they could resume their labors.

Daylight was coming when the last boat cast off and the *Fair Play*, with a hoarse triumphant blast of her whistle, faded into the north, her part in the expedition at an end.

O'Reilly bore Norine Evans ashore in his arms, and when he placed her feet upon Cuban soil she hugged him, crying:

"We fooled them, Johnnie! But if it hadn't been for you we'd have turned back. The captain was afraid of the reef."

"I don't mind telling you I was afraid, too," he sighed, wearily. "Now then, about all we have to fear are Spanish coast-guards."

Dawn showed the voyagers that they were indeed fortunate, for they were upon the mainland of Cuba, and as far as they could see, both east and west, the reef was unbroken. There was still some uncertainty as to their precise position, for the jungle at their backs shut off their view of the interior; but that gave them little concern. Men were lolling about, exhausted, but Major Ramos allowed them no time for rest; he roused them, and kept them on the go until the priceless supplies had been collected within the shelter of the brush. Then he broke open certain packages, and distributed arms among his followers.

Even while this was going on there came an alarm; over the low promontory that cut off the eastern coast-line a streamer of smoke was seen. There was a scurry for cover; the little band lay low and watched while a Spanish cruiser stole past not more than a mile outside the line of froth.

The three Americans, who were munching a tasteless breakfast of pilot-bread, were joined by Major Ramos. He was no longer the immaculate personage he had been: he was barefooted; his clothes were torn; his trousers were rolled up to the knee and whitened by sea-water, while the revolver at his hip and the bandolier of cartridges over his shoulder lent him an incongruously ferocious appearance. Ever since Norine had so rudely shattered his romantic fancies the major had treated both her and O'Reilly with a stiff and distant formality. He began now by saying:

"I am despatching a message to General Gomez's headquarters, asking him to send a pack-train and an escort for these supplies. There is danger here; perhaps you would like to go on with the couriers."

O'Reilly accepted eagerly; then thinking of the girl, he said, doubtfully:

"I'm afraid Miss Evans isn't equal to the trip."

"Nonsense! I'm equal to anything," Norine declared. And indeed she looked capable enough as she stood there in her short walking-suit and stout boots.

Branch alone declined the invitation, vowing that he was too weak to budge. If there was the faintest prospect of riding to the interior he infinitely preferred to await the opportunity, he said, even at the risk of an attack by Spanish soldiers in the mean time.

It took O'Reilly but a short time to collect the few articles necessary for the trip; indeed, his bundle was so small that Norine was dismayed.

"Can't I take any clothes?" she inquired in a panic. "I can't live without a change."

"It is something you'll have to learn," he told her. "An Insurrecto with two shirts is wealthy. Some of them haven't any."

"Isn't it likely to rain on us?"

"It's almost sure to."

Miss Evans pondered this prospect; then she laughed. "It must feel funny," she said.

There were three other members of the traveling-party, men who knew something of the country round about; they were good fighters, doubtless, but in spite of their shiny new weapons they resembled soldiers even less than did their major. All were dressed as they had been when they left New York; one even wore a derby hat and pointed patent-leather shoes. Nevertheless, Norine Evans thought the little cavalcade presented quite a martial appearance as it filed away into the jungle.

The first few miles were trying, for the coast was swampy and thickly grown up to underbrush; but in time the jungle gave place to higher timber and to open savannas deep in guinea-grass. Soon after noon the travelers came to a farm, the owner of which was known to one of the guides, and here a stop was made in order to secure horses and food.

It was a charming little rancho. The palm-thatched house was set in a grove of mamey and mango trees, all heavily burdened with fruit; there was a vianda-patch, and, wonder of wonders, there were a half-dozen cows dozing in the shade. Spying these animals, Norine promptly demanded a glass of milk, and O'Reilly translated her request to the farmer.

The man was obliging until he learned that the American lady purposed drinking the milk fresh and warm; then he refused positively. Fresh milk was full of fever, he explained: it was alive with germs. He would bring her, instead, some which had been boiled and salted in the usual Cuban manner. This he did, but after one bitter mouthful Norine insisted upon her original request. With a dubious shake of his head and a further warning the farmer directed his son to oblige the pretty lady by milking one of the cows; he made it plain, however, that he disclaimed all responsibility for the result.

Johnnie, who was badly fagged from the previous night's work, found a shady spot and stretched himself out for a nap. He inquired idly if there were any Spaniards in the vicinity, and learned that there were, but that they seldom came this way.

"We'd never see them here, if it were not for these sin verguenzas—may a bad lightning split them!—who take money to show them the bridle-paths," the countryman explained. "I'd like to guide them once. I'd lead them into a swamp and leave them to sink in the mud, then I'd go back and cut off their heads. Ha! That would be a satisfaction, now, wouldn't it?"

O'Reilly agreed sleepily that it would doubtless be a very great satisfaction indeed.

"I'm as good a patriot as God ever made," the fellow ran on. "You can see that, eh? But what do you think? I have a brother, a very blood brother, who would sell himself for a peseta. He passed here the other day at the head of a whole Spanish guerrillero." The speaker bared his teeth and spat viciously. "Christ! How I would like to cut his throat!"

The shade was grateful. O'Reilly dozed. He was awakened by being roughly shaken, and he found the man with the derby hat bending over him. The fellow was excited; his eyes were ringed with white; his expression bespoke the liveliest alarm. Loud voices came from the rear of the *bohio*.

"What's the matter? Spaniards?" Johnnie was on his feet in an instant.

"No, no! Your señorita!" the man gasped. "For the love of God come quickly." He set off at a run, and Johnnie followed, a prey to sudden sick misgivings.

Around the house they dashed, and into a group the center of which was Norine herself, a gourdful of milk in one hand, a partially devoured mango in the other. At first glance there seemed to be nothing amiss; but the

owner of the farm was dancing; he was trying to seize first the mango, then the drinking-vessel. His wife was wringing her hands and crying, shrilly:

"God have mercy! So young—so beautiful! What a pity!"

The two filibusters and the farmer's eldest son, all visibly perturbed, likewise joined in the commotion, while the smaller children looked on from the background and whimpered.

"What's happened?" O'Reilly demanded, breathlessly.

Norine turned a puzzled face to him, meanwhile warding off the farmer's attack. "I can't quite make out," she said. "They all talk at once. Please ask them what I've done." Mechanically she raised the ripe mango to her lips, whereupon the *ranchero*, with a yell, leaped upon her and violently wrenched it out of her fingers.

Facing O'Reilly, the man panted: "There! You saw her! She wouldn't listen to my wife—"

"Oh, I warned her!" wailed the woman. "But it was too late."

"You must tell her what she has done," said the fellow in the stiff hat.

"Well, what has she done?" Johnnie managed to inquire, whereupon every one began a separate explanation:

"She will never become your wife. . . . Look! That's not her first mango. . . . Enough to destroy an army. . . . You can see for yourself. . . . Wait! Ask her how many she ate. Ask her, señor, I implore you!"

There was a silence while Johnnie translated the question and repeated the answer:

"She says she doesn't remember, they are so nice and ripe—"

"'So nice and ripe'!" shouted the owner of the farm, tearing his hair.

"'So nice and ripe'!" echoed his wife.

"'So nice and ripe'!" groaned the man who had awak-

ened O'Reilly. "Major Ramos told me to guard her with my life because she is the guest of Cuba. Well, I shall kill myself."

The country woman laid a trembling hand upon Norine's arm, inquiring, gently: "How are you feeling, my beautiful dove? Sick, eh?"

"What on earth ails these people?" inquired the object of all this solicitude. "I haven't made away with a baby. Maybe they're afraid I won't pay for my food?"

Light came to O'Reilly. "I remember now," said he. "Mangoes and milk are supposed to be poisonous. The woman wants to know how you feel."

"Poisonous! Nonsense! They taste splendid. Tell her I'm still half starved."

It proved now that one of the three members of the landing-party possessed an unsuspected knowledge of English, which modesty alone had prevented him from revealing. Under the stress of his emotion he broke out:

"Oh, missy! Those fruit is skill you."

"I don't believe it," Miss Evans declared.

"It skill you, all right. Maybe you got a headache here, eh?" The speaker laid a hand upon his abdomen and leaned forward expectantly.

"Nothing but an aching void."

This confession, or a garbled translation of it, was enough for the others; it confirmed their worst fears. The farmer volunteered to ride for the nearest priest, but hesitated, declaring it a waste of time, inasmuch as the lady would be dead in half an hour. His wife ran to the house for her crucifix and rosary, which latter she insisted upon hanging around Norine's neck. After that she directed the men to carry the sufferer indoors, her intention being to make her guest's last moments as comfortable as possible. When Norine refused to be carried she was warned that the least exertion would but hasten the end, which was, alas! all too near.

O'Reilly was impressed, in spite of himself, by this weight of conviction, especially when the Cubans ridiculed his suggestion that the combination of milk and mango might not prove altogether fatal to an American. Nothing, they assured him, could possibly be deadlier than this abominable mixture.

The victim herself, however, remained skeptical; she alone treated the matter lightly, and although she did finally consent to lie down, it was merely to please the others and because she was tired.

"They have set their minds on seeing me expire, and they're such nice people I'm almost ashamed to disappoint them," she confided to O'Reilly. "But really I'm too hungry to die. Now don't forget to call me when dinner is ready."

"Honestly, do you feel all right?" he asked of her.

"Never better."

The meal was slow in coming, for not only were the cooking arrangements primitive, but the apprehensive housewife could not long remain away from the sick-room. She made frequent visits thereto, and after each she reported in a whisper the condition of the patient. The lady looked very white. . . . Her breathing was becoming slower. . . . She was unconscious. . . . All would soon be over. . . . It was better to let her pass painlessly to paradise than to torture her with useless remedies. Realizing that the poison had at last begun to work, the men tiptoed to the door and peered in compassionately, whereupon the sufferer roused herself sufficiently to call them "a lot of rubber-necks" and bid them begone.

"Her mind wanders," explained the man of the house; and then to cheer O'Reilly he added, "She is young and strong; she may linger until evening."

The meal was set at last, however; the men were stealthily attacking it. Suddenly the sick woman swept out from her retreat and sat down among them.

"Señorita! This is suicide!" they implored.

Then, as she ignored them and helped herself liberally to the food, their own appetites vanished and they pushed themselves away from the table.

With a twinkle in his eye O'Reilly said, gravely, "Dying people have strange fancies. Pray don't thwart her."

Indifference so callous on the part of a lover shocked the Cubans. They rebuked O'Reilly silently; it was plain that they considered Americans a barbarously cold-blooded race. Meanwhile they apprehensively watched Norine's every mouthful.

When, after a time, no ill effects having appeared, she suggested departing, they whispered together. They agreed at last that it was perhaps the course of wisdom to humor her. She was the guest of their Government; it would not do to displease her. Inasmuch as her end was inevitable, it could matter little whether she died here or elsewhere. Accordingly they saddled their borrowed horses and set out.

All that afternoon Norine was an object of the tenderest solicitude on the part of her three Cuban guides. They momentarily expected to see her stricken. Then when she gave no sign of distress they marveled, and expressed great admiration at her fortitude in enduring pain.

That night was spent at another farm-house. When on the next morning Norine not only was seen to be alive and well, but insisted upon making her breakfast of mangoes and milk, the fellow in the derby hat flung his hands on high and told O'Reilly:

"It is no less than a miracle, but now she courts the wrath of God, señor! As for me, I shall never again associate with eccentric persons who delight to fly in the face of Providence. It is my opinion that all Americans are crazy."

The party had penetrated to the foot-hills of the Sierra de Cubitas now, and as they ascended, the scenery

changed. Rarely is the Cuban landscape anything but pleasing. For the most part green pastures sown with stately palm-trees and laid out as if for a picnic alternate with low rolling hills, and in but few places are the altitudes at all impressive. It is a smiling island. It has been said, too, that everything in it is friendly to man: the people are amiable, warm-hearted; the very animals and insects are harmless. Cuban cattle are shy, but trusting; Cuban horses are patient and affectionate; the serpents have no poison, and although the spiders and the scorpions grow large and forbidding, their sting is ineffective. But here in the Cubitas range all was different. The land was stern and forbidding: cañons deep and damp raised dripping walls to the sky; bridle-paths skirted ledges that were bold and fearsome, or lost themselves in gloomy jungles as noisome as Spanish dungeons. Hidden away in these fastnesses, the rebel Government had established its capital. Here, safe from surprise, the soldiers of Gomez and Maceo and Garcia rested between attacks, nursing their wounded and recruiting their strength for further sallies.

It was a strange seat of government—no nation ever had a stranger—for the state buildings were huts of bark and leaves, the army was uniformed in rags. Cook-fires smoldered in the open glades; cavalry horses grazed in the grassy streets, and wood-smoke drifted over them.

The second evening brought O'Reilly and Miss Evans safely through, and at news of the expedition's success a pack-train was made ready to go to its assistance. Norine's letter from the New York Junta was read, and the young woman was warmly welcomed. One of the better huts was vacated for her use, and the officers of the provisional Government called to pay their respects.

XVII

THE CITY OF BEGGARS

THERE were other Americans in Cubitas, as O'Reilly soon discovered. During his first inspection of the village he heard himself hailed in his own language, and a young man in dirty white trousers and jacket strode toward him.

"Welcome to our city!" the stranger cried. "I'm Judson, Captain of Artillery, Departmento del Oriente; and you're the fellow who came with that quinine lady, aren't you?"

O'Reilly acknowledged his identity, and Judson grinned:

"The whole camp is talking about her and those mangoes. Jove! It's a wonder she didn't die of fright. Something tells me you're Irish. Anyhow, you look as if you'd enjoy a scrap. Know anything about artillery?"

"Nothing whatever."

"I'm sorry. We need gunners. Still, you know as much as the rest of us did when we came."

"I'm not a fighter," Johnnie told him. "I'm here on —other business."

Captain Judson was plainly disappointed. Nevertheless, he volunteered to assist his countryman in any way possible. "Have you met the old man," he inquired—"General Gomez?"

"No, I'd like to meet him."

"Come along, then; I'll introduce you. This is about the right time of day for it; he'll probably be in good

humor. He has dyspepsia, you know, and he's not always pleasant."

It was nearly sundown; the eastern slopes were in shadow, and supper was cooking. As the two men passed down the wide street between its rows of *bohios* the fragrance of burning fagots was heavy in the air—that odor which is sweet in the nostrils of every man who knows and loves the out-of-doors. To O'Reilly it was like the scents of Araby, for his hopes were high, his feet were light, and he believed his goal was in sight.

Gen. Maximo Gomez, father of patriots, bulwark of the Cuban cause, was seated in a hammock, reading some letters; O'Reilly recognized him instantly from the many pictures he had seen. Gomez was a keen, wiry old man; the color of his swarthy, sun-bitten cheeks was thrown into deeper relief by his snow-white mustache and goatee. He looked up at Judson's salute and then turned a pair of brilliant eyes, as hard as glass, upon O'Reilly. His was an irascible, brooding face; it had in it something of the sternness, the exalted detachment, of the eagle, and O'Reilly gained a hint of the personality behind it. Maximo Gomez was counted one of the world's ablest guerrilla leaders; and indeed it had required the quenchless enthusiasm of a real military genius to fuse into a homogeneous fighting force the ill-assorted rabble of nondescripts whom Gomez led, to school them to privation and to render them sufficiently mobile to defy successfully ten times their number of trained troops. This, however, was precisely what the old Porto-Rican had done, and in doing it he had won the admiration of military students. He it was, more than any other, who bore the burden of Cuba's unequal struggle; it was Gomez's cunning and Gomez's indomitable will which had already subjugated half the island of Cuba; it was Gomez's stubborn, unflagging resistance which was destined to shatter for all time the hopes of Spain in the New World.

With a bluntness not unkind he asked O'Reilly what had brought him to Cuba. Then before the young man could answer he gestured with a letter in his hand, saying:

"Major Ramos gives you splendid credit for helping him to land his expedition, but he says you didn't come to fight with us. What does he mean?"

When O'Reilly explained the reason for his presence the old fighter nodded.

"So? You wish to go west, eh?"

"Yes, sir. I want to find Colonel Lopez."

"Lopez? Miguel Lopez?" the general inquired, quickly.

"I believe that's his name—at any rate the Colonel Lopez who has been operating in Matanzas Province. You see, he knows the whereabouts of my—friends."

"Well, you won't have to look far for him." General Gomez's leathery countenance lightened into a smile. "He happens to be right here in Cubitas." Calling Judson to him, he said: "Amigo, take Mr. O'Reilly to Colonel Lopez; you will find him somewhere about. I am sorry we are not to have this young fellow for a soldier; he looks like a real man and—quite equal to five quintos, eh?"

It was the habit of the Cubans to refer to their enemies as *quintos*—the fifth part of a man! With a wave of his hand Gomez returned to his reading.

As Judson led his companion away he said: "When you have finished with Lopez come to my shack and we'll have supper and I'll introduce you to the rest of our gang. You won't get much to eat, for we're short of grub; but it's worse where Lopez comes from."

Col. Miguel Lopez, a handsome, animated fellow, took O'Reilly's hand in a hearty clasp when they were introduced; but a moment later his smile gave way to a frown and his brow darkened.

"So! You are that O'Reilly from Matanzas," said he. "I know you now, but—I never expected we would meet."

"Estéban Varona told you about me, did he not?"

The colonel inclined his head.

"I'm here at last, after the devil's own time. I've been trying every way to get through. The Spaniards stopped me at Puerto Principe—they sent me back home, you know. I've been half crazy. I— You—" O'Reilly swallowed hard. "You know where Estéban is? Tell me—"

"Have you heard nothing?"

"Nothing whatever. That is, nothing since Rosa, his sister— You understand, she and I are—engaged—"

"Yes, yes; Estéban told me all about you."

Something in the Cuban's gravity of manner gave O'Reilly warning. A sudden fear assailed him. His voice shook as he asked:

"What is it? My God! Not bad news?"

There was no need for the officer to answer. In his averted gaze O'Reilly read confirmation of his sickest apprehensions. The men faced each other for a long moment, while the color slowly drove out of the American's cheeks, leaving him pallid, stricken. He wet his lips to speak, but his voice was no more than a dry, throaty rustle.

"Tell me! Which one?" he whispered.

"Both!"

O'Reilly recoiled; a spasm distorted his chalky face. He began to shake weakly, and his fingers plucked aimlessly at each other.

Lopez took him by the arm. "Try to control yourself," said he. "Sit here while I try to tell you what little I know. Or, would it not be better to wait awhile, until you are calmer?" As the young man made no answer, except to stare at him in a white agony of suspense, he sighed: "Very well, then, as you wish. But you must be a man, like the rest of us. I, too, have suffered. My father"— Lopez's mustached lip drew back, and his teeth showed

through—"died in the Laurel Ditch at Cabañas. On the very day after my first victory they shot him—an old man. Christ! It is because of such things that we Cubans fight while we starve—that we shall continue to fight until no Spaniard is left upon this island. We have all faced something like that which you are facing now—our parents murdered, our sisters and our sweethearts wronged. . . ."

O'Reilly, huddled where he had sunk upon the bench, uttered a gasping, inarticulate cry, and covered his face as if from a lash.

"I will tell you all I know—which isn't much. Estéban Varona came to me soon after he and his sister had fled from their home; he wanted to join my forces, but we were harassed on every side, and I didn't dare take the girl—no woman could have endured the hardships we suffered. So I convinced him that his first duty was to her, rather than to his country, and he agreed. He was a fine boy! He had spirit. He bought some stolen rifles and armed a band of his own—which wasn't a bad idea. I used to hear about him. Nobody cared to molest him, I can tell you, until finally he killed some of the regular troops. Then of course they went after him. Meanwhile, he managed to destroy his own plantations, which Cueto had robbed him of. You knew Cueto?"

"Yes."

"Well, Estéban put an end to him after a while; rode right up to La Joya one night, broke in the door, and macheted the scoundrel in his bed. But there was a mistake of some sort. It seems that a body of Cobo's Volunteers were somewhere close by, and the two parties met. I have never learned all the details of the affair, and the stories of that fight which came to me are too preposterous for belief. Still, Estéban and his men must have fought like demons, for they killed some incredible number. But they were human—they could not defeat

a regiment. It seems that only one or two of them escaped."

"Estéban? Did he—"

Colonel Lopez nodded; then he said, gravely: "Cobo takes no prisoners. I was in the Rubi hills at the time, fighting hard, and it was six weeks before I got back into Matanzas. Naturally, when I heard what had happened, I tried to find the girl, but Weyler was concentrating the pacificos by that time, and there was nobody left in the Yumuri; it was a desert."

"Then you don't know positively that she . . . that she—"

"Wait. There is no doubt that the boy was killed, but of Rosa's fate I can only form my own opinion. However, one of Estéban's men joined my troops later, and I not only learned something about the girl, but also why Estéban had been so relentlessly pursued. It was all Cobo's doings. You have heard of the fellow? No? Well, you will." The speaker's tone was eloquent of hatred. "He is worse than the worst of them—a monster! He had seen Miss Varona. She was a beautiful girl. . . ."

"Go on!" whispered the lover.

"I discovered that she didn't at first obey Weyler's edict. She and the two negroes—they were former slaves of her father, I believe—took refuge in the Pan de Matanzas. Later on, Cobo's men made a raid and—killed a great many. Some few escaped into the high ravines, but Miss Varona was not one of them. Out of regard for Estéban I made careful search, but I could find no trace of her."

"And yet, you don't *know* what happened?" O'Reilly ventured. "You're not sure?"

"No, but I tell you again Cobo's men take no prisoners. When I heard about that raid I gave up looking for her."

"This—Cobo"—the American's voice shook in spite

of his effort to hold it steady—"I shall hope to meet him some time."

The sudden fury that filled Colonel Lopez's face was almost hidden by the gloom. "Yes. Oh yes!" he cried, quickly, "and you are but one of a hundred; I am another. In my command there is a standing order to spare neither Cobo nor any of his assassins; they neither expect nor receive quarter from us. Now, compañero"—the Cuban dropped a hand on O'Reilly's bowed head—"I am sorry that I had to bring you such evil tidings, but, we are men —and this is war."

"No, no! It isn't war—it's merciless savagery! To murder children and to outrage women—why, that violates all the ethics of warfare."

"Ethics!" the colonel cried, harshly. "Ethics? Hell is without ethics. Why look for ethics in war? Violence —injustice—insanity—chaos—*that* is war. It is man's agony—woman's despair. It is a defiance of God. War is without mercy, without law; it is—well, it is the absence of all law, all good."

There was a considerable silence. Then Lopez went on in another key.

"We Cubans carry heavy hearts, but our wrongs have made us mighty, and our sufferings have made us brave. Here in the orient we do well enough; but, believe me, you cannot imagine the desolation and the suffering farther west—whole provinces made barren and their inhabitants either dead or dying. The world has never seen anything like Weyler's slaughter of the innocents. If there is indeed a God—and sometimes I doubt it—he will not permit this horror to continue; from every pool of Cuban blood another patriot will spring up, until we drive that archfiend and his armies into the sea. Go back to your own country now, and if your grief has made you one of us in sympathy, tell the world what that black butcher in Havana is doing, and beg your Government to

recognize our belligerency, so that we may have arms. *Arms!*"

It was some time before O'Reilly spoke; then he said, quietly: "I am not going back. I am going to stay here and look for Rosa."

"So!" exclaimed the colonel. "Well, why not? So long as we do not know precisely what has happened to her, we can at least hope. But, if I were you, I would rather think of her as dead than as a prisoner in some concentration camp. You don't know what those camps are like, my friend, but I do. Now I shall leave you. One needs to be alone at such an hour—eh?" With a pressure of his hand, Colonel Lopez walked away into the darkness.

Judson and his adventurous countryman did not see O'Reilly that night, nor, in fact, did any one. But the next morning he appeared before General Gomez. He was haggard, sick, listless. The old Porto-Rican had heard from Lopez in the mean time; he was sympathetic.

"I am sorry you came all the way to hear such bad news," he said. "War is a sad, hopeless business."

"But I haven't given up hope," O'Reilly said. "I want to stay here and—and fight."

"I inferred as much from what Lopez told me." The general nodded his white head. "Well, you'll make a good soldier, and we shall be glad to have you." He extended his hand, and O'Reilly took it gratefully.

The city of Matanzas was "pacified." So ran the boastful *bando* of the captain-general. And this was no exaggeration, as any one could see from the number of beggars there. Of all his military operations, this "pacification" of the western towns and provinces was the most conspicuously successful and the one which gave Valeriano Weyler the keenest satisfaction; for nowhere did rebellion lift its head—except, perhaps, among the ranks of those

disaffected men who hid in the hills, with nothing above them but the open sky. As for the population at large, it was cured of treason; it no longer resisted, even weakly, the law of Spain. The reason was that it lay dying. Weyler's cure was simple, efficacious—it consisted of extermination, swift and pitiless.

Poverty had been common in Matanzas, even before the war, but now there were so many beggars in the city that nobody undertook to count them. When the refugees began to pour in by the thousands, and when it became apparent that the Government intended to let them starve, the better citizens undertook an effort at relief; but times were hard, food was scarce, and prices high. Moreover, it soon transpired that the military frowned upon everything like organized charity, and in consequence the new-comers were, perforce, abandoned to their own devices. These country people were dumb and terrified at the misfortunes which had overtaken them; they wandered the streets in aimless bewilderment, fearful of what blow might next befall. They were not used to begging, and therefore they did not often implore alms; but all day long they asked for work, for bread, that their little ones might live. Work, however, was even scarcer than food, and the time soon came when they crouched upon curbs and door-steps, hopeless, beaten, silently reproachful of those more fortunate than they. Their eyes grew big and hollow; their outstretched hands grew gaunt and skinny. The sound of weeping women and fretting babies became a common thing to hear.

In the suburbs, just within the ring of guardian forts, an "area of cultivation" was set aside, and here the prisoners put up huts of *yagua*—comfortless bark shelters, which were well enough, perhaps, in fair weather, but sadly ineffective against wind and rain. Here, housed with hunger and crowded together in indescribable squalor, they dwelt, seeking comfort in their common

wretchedness. Since they had no farm implements, no seeds, no means whatever of cultivating this ground apportioned to their use, it remained untilled while they grew hungrier day by day. Outside the lines there were yams, potatoes, edible roots and such, for the Spaniards' work of desolation had not been quite complete, and no hand can rob the Cuban soil of all its riches; but the *pacificos* were not allowed to leave the city.

Fish were plentiful in the harbor, too, but to catch them was forbidden. Sentries were on guard with ready rifles and bared machetes; every morning through the filthy *reconcentrado* quarter guerrillas drove pack-mules bearing the mutilated bodies of those who had dared during the night to seek food surreptitiously. Sometimes they dragged these ghastly reminders at the ends of ropes; this, indeed, was a favorite way with them.

Dogs and cats became choice articles of diet, until they disappeared. The Government did supply one quality of food, however; at intervals, it distributed yucca roots. But these were starchy and almost indigestible. From eating them the children grew pinched in limb and face, while their abdomens bloated hugely. Matanzas became peopled with a race of grotesquely misshapen little folks, gnomes with young bodies, but with faces old and sick.

Of course disease became epidemic, for in the leaky hovels, dirt-floored and destitute of any convenience, there could be no effort at sanitation. Conditions became unspeakable. The children died first, then the aged and infirm. Deaths in the street were not uncommon; nearly every morning bodies were found beneath the *portales*. Starving creatures crept to the market in the hope of begging a stray bit of food, and some of them died there, between the empty stalls. The death-wagons, heavy with their daily freight, rumbled ceaselessly through the streets, adding to the giant piles of unburied corpses outside the city.

Typhoid, smallpox, yellow fever, raged unchecked. The hospitals were crowded, and even in them the commonest necessities were lacking. It is believed that men have returned from the grave, but no one, either Spaniard or Cuban, had ever been known to return from one of these pest-houses, and, in consequence, those who were stricken preferred to remain and to die among their dear ones.

Yes, Matanzas was pacified. Weyler's boast was true. Nowhere in the entire province was a field in cultivation; nowhere, outside the garrisoned towns, was a house left standing. Nor was the city of Matanzas the only concentration camp; there were others dotted through Santa Clara, Habana, and Pinar del Rio. In them half a million people cried for food. Truly no rebellious land was ever more completely pacified than this, no people's spirits ever more completely crushed. Voices no longer preached resistance; they prayed to "Our Lady of Pity" for a merciful conclusion of this misery. Hands were upraised, but only to implore. In leaky huts from Jucaro to Cape San Antonio the dead lay huddled thickly.

Into Matanzas, city of beggary and death, came Rosa Varona and her two negro companions, looking for relief. They made the journey without mishap, for they were too destitute to warrant plundering, and Rosa's disguise concealed what charms remained to her. But once they had entered the city, what an awakening! What suffering, what poverty, what rags they saw! The three of them grew weak with dismay at the horror of it all; but there was no retreat.

Asensio built a makeshift shelter close under La Cumbre—from it the ruins of the *Quinta de Estéban* were visible—and there they settled down to live. They had hoped to lose themselves among the other prisoners, and in this they were successful, for none of their miserable

neighbors were in any condition to notice them, and there was nothing sufficiently conspicuous about two tattered blacks and their hunchbacked daughter to draw attention from the soldiers.

Asensio foraged zealously, and at first he managed somehow to secure enough food for his little family. He developed a real talent for discovering vegetables and fruits. He stole, he begged, and he found food where there was none. One day the soldiers seized him and put him to work on the fortifications along with a gang of other men who appeared strong enough to stand hard labor. Asensio was not paid for this, but he was allowed one meal a day, and he succeeded in bringing home each night a share of his allotment.

It is surprising how little nourishment will sustain life. Rosa and her two friends had long felt the pinch of hunger, but now they plumbed new depths of privation, for there were days when Asensio and his fellow-conscripts received nothing at all. After a time Evangelina began making baskets and weaving palm-leaf hats, which she sold at six cents each. She taught Rosa the craft, and they worked from dawn until dark, striving with nimble, tireless fingers to supplement Asensio's rations and postpone starvation. But it was a hopeless task. Other nimble fingers worked as tirelessly as theirs, and the demand for hats was limited.

Their hut overlooked the road to San Severino, that *via dolorosa* on which condemned prisoners were marched out to execution, and in time the women learned to recognize the peculiar blaring notes of a certain cornet, which signified that another "Cuban cock was about to crow." When in the damp of dewy mornings they heard that bugle they ceased their weaving long enough to cross themselves and whisper a prayer for the souls of those who were on their way to die. But this was the only respite they allowed themselves.

Rosa meditated much upon the contrast between her present and her former condition. Matanzas was the city of her birth, and time was when she had trod its streets in arrogance and pride, when she had possessed friends by the score among its residents. But of all these there was not one to whom she dared appeal in this, her hour of need. These were harsh times; Spanish hatred of the revolutionists was bitter, and of the Cuban sympathizers none were left. Moreover, Estéban's denouncement as a traitor had estranged all who remained loyal to the crown, and so far as Rosa herself was concerned, she knew that it would not matter to them that she had cleaved to him merely from sisterly devotion: by that act she had made herself a common enemy and they would scarcely sympathize with her plight. The girl had learned only too well what spirit was abroad. But even had she felt assured of meeting sympathy, her pride was pure Castilian, and it would never down. She, a Varona, whose name was one to conjure with, whose lineage was of the highest! *She* to beg? The thing was quite impossible. One crumb, so taken, would have choked her. Rosa preferred to suffer proudly and await the hour when hunger or disease would at last blot out her memories of happy days and end this nightmare misery.

Then, too, she dreaded any risk of discovery by old Mario de Castaño, who was a hard, vindictive man. His parting words had shown her that he would never forgive the slight she had put upon him; and she did not wish to put his threats to the test. Once Rosa saw him, on her way to buy a few centavos' worth of sweet-potatoes; he was huddled in his victoria, a huge bladder of flesh, and he rode the streets deaf to the plaints of starving children, blind to the misery of beseeching mothers. Rosa shrank into a doorway and drew her tattered shawl closer over her face for fear Don Mario might recognize in this mis-

shapen body and in these pinched, discolored features the beauteous blossom he had craved.

Nor did she forget Colonel Cobo. The man's memory haunted her, asleep and awake; of him she was most desperately afraid. When for the first time she saw him riding at the head of his cutthroats she was like to swoon in her tracks, and for a whole day thereafter she cowered in the hut, trembling at every sound.

In these dark hours she recalled the stories of the old Varona treasure and Estéban's interesting theory of its whereabouts, but she could not bring herself to put much faith in either. At the time of her brother's recital she had been swayed by his conviction, but now on cooler thought a dozen explanations of Doña Isabel's possession of that doubloon offered themselves, no one of which seemed less probable than Estéban's. Of course it was barely possible that there was indeed a treasure, and even that Estéban's surmise had been correct. But it was little more than a remote possibility. Distance lends a rosy color of reality to our most absurd imaginings, but, like the haze that tints a far-off landscape, it dissolves upon approach. Now that Rosa was here, in sight of the ruined *quinta* itself, her hopes and half-beliefs faded.

She wanted, oh, so desperately, to believe in it, but the grinding misery of her situation made it hard to do so. Wonders like that came true only in fairy stories, she told herself; and certainly she had no cause to consider herself a favorite of fortune.

More than once she was tempted to confide in Evangelina and Asensio, but she thought better of it. Although she put implicit faith in Evangelina's discretion, she knew that Asensio was not the sort of fellow to be trusted with a secret of great magnitude—he was boastful, talkative, excitable; he was just the sort to bring destruction upon all of them. Rosa had sufficient intelligence to realize that even if she found her father's riches they would only

constitute another and a greater menace to the lives of all of them. Nevertheless, she wished to set her mind at rest once and for all. Taking Evangelina with her, she climbed La Cumbre one day in search of roots and vegetables.

It turned out to be a sad experience for both women. The negress wept noisily at the destruction wrought by Pancho Cueto, and Rosa was overcome by painful memories. Little that was familiar remained; evidence of Cueto's all-devouring greed spoke from the sprouting furrows his men had dug, from the naked trees they had felled and piled in orderly heaps, from the stones and mortar of the house itself. Tears blinded Rosa. After a time she left the black woman mourning among the ruins and stole away to the sunken garden. Here the marks of vandalism were less noticeable. Nevertheless, few signs of beauty remained. Neglected vines drooped spiritlessly from the ledges: such fruit-trees as had been spared were sickly and untended; time and the elements had all but completed the disheartening work.

The well remained, although it had been planked over, but it was partially filled up with rubbish, as Rosa discovered when she peered into it. Only a tiny pool of scum was in the bottom. After a long scrutiny the girl arose, convinced at last of her brother's delusion, and vaguely ashamed of her own credulity. This was about the last repository that such a man as Don Estéban, her father, would have been likely to select; for, after all, the most valuable part of his fortune had consisted of the deeds of title to the plantations. No, if ever there had been a treasure, it was hidden elsewhere; all of value that this well contained for Rosa was her memory of a happiness departed. Of such memories, the well, the whole place, was brimful. Here, as a child, she had romped with Estéban. Here, as a girl, she had dreamed her first dreams, and here O'Reilly, her smiling knight,

had found her. Yonder was the very spot where he had held her in his arms and begged her to await the day of his return. Well, she had waited.

But was that Rosa Varona who had promised so freely and so confidently this pitiful Rosa whose bones protruded through her rags? It could not be. Happiness, contentment, hope—these were fictions; only misery, despair, and pain were real. But it had been a glorious dream, at any rate—a dream which Rosa vowed to cherish always.

Evangelina found the girl sitting in the sun, her thin face radiant, her great eyes wet but smiling.

"Come, little dove," said the negress, "there is nothing here to eat; we must get back to our weaving."

XVIII

SPEAKING OF FOOD

IT was part of the strategy practised by the Cuban leaders to divide their forces into separate columns for the purpose of raiding the smaller Spanish garrisons and harassing the troops sent to their relief, reassembling these bands only when and where some telling blow was to be struck. Not only had the military value of this practice been amply demonstrated, but it had been proved a necessity, owing to the fact that the Insurrectos were compelled to live off the country.

When O'Reilly and Branch enlisted in the Army of the Orient they were assigned to the command of Colonel Miguel Lopez, and it was under his leadership that they made their first acquaintance with the peculiar methods of Cuban warfare.

Active service for the two Americans began at once; scarcely a week had passed before Leslie Branch gained his opportunity of tasting the "salt of life" in its full flavor, for the young Matanzas colonel was one of the few Cuban commanders who really enjoyed a fight.

There had been, at first, some doubt of Branch's fitness to take the field at all—he had suffered a severe hemorrhage shortly after his arrival at Cubitas—and it was only after a hysterical demonstration on his part that he had been accepted as a soldier. He simply would not be left behind. At first the Cubans regarded him with mingled contempt and pity, for certainly no less

promising volunteer had ever taken service with them. Nevertheless, he would doubtless have made many friends among them had he not begun his service by refusing to abide by discipline of any sort and by scorning all instruction in the use of arms, declaring this to be, in his case, a silly waste of effort. Such an attitude very naturally aroused resentment among the other men; it was not long before they began to grumble at the liberty allowed this headstrong weakling. But upon the occasion of the very first fight this ill-will disappeared as if by magic, for, although Branch deliberately disobeyed orders, he nevertheless displayed such amazing audacity in the face of the enemy, such a theatrical contempt for bullets, as to stupefy every one. Moreover, he lived up to his reputation; he continued to be insanely daring, varying his exploits to correspond with his moods, with the result that he attained a popularity which was unique, nay, sensational.

His conduct in the face of this general admiration was no less unexpected than his behavior under fire: Branch gruffly refused to accept any tribute whatever; he snarled, he fairly barked at those of his comrades who tried to express their appreciation of his conduct—a demeanor which of course awakened even greater admiration among the Cubans. He was uniformly surly and sour; he sneered, he scoffed, he found fault. He had the tongue of a common scold, and he used it with malevolent abandon.

It was fortunate indeed that he knew no Spanish and that most of his companions were equally ignorant of English, for mere admiration, even of the fervent Latin quality, would scarcely have been proof against his spleen. As it was, his camp-mates endured his vituperations blandly, putting him down as a pleasing eccentric in whom there blazed a curious but inspiring spirit of patriotism.

O'Reilly alone understood the reason for the fellow's

morbid irritability, his suicidal recklessness; but when he privately remonstrated he was gruffly told to mind his own business. Branch flatly refused to modify his conduct; he seemed really bent upon cheating the disease that made his life a misery.

But, as usual, Fate was perverse; she refused to humor the sick man's hope. When, after blindly inviting death, Leslie had emerged from several engagements unscathed, his surprise—and perhaps a natural relief at finding himself whole—became tinged with a certain apprehension lest he survive those deliberately courted dangers, only to succumb to the ills and privations of camp life. Cuban equipment was of the scantiest. Cuban dews are heavy; Cuban nights are cool—these were perils indeed for a weak-lunged invalid. Branch began to fret. Rain filled him with more terror than fixed bayonets, a chill caused him keener consternation than did a thousand Spaniards; he began to have agonizing visions of himself lying in some leaky hovel of a hospital. It was typical of his peculiar irritability that he held O'Reilly in some way responsible, and vented upon him his bitterness of spirit.

The fellow's tongue grew ever sharper; his society became intolerable, his gloom oppressive and irresistibly contagious. When, after several weeks of campaigning, the column went into camp for a short rest, O'Reilly decided that he would try to throw off the burden of Leslie's overwhelming dejection, and, if possible, shift a portion of it upon the shoulders of Captain Judson.

On the day after their arrival O'Reilly and the big artilleryman took advantage of a pleasant stream to bathe and wash their clothes; then, while they lay in their hammocks, enjoying the luxury of a tattered oil-cloth shelter and waiting for the sun to dry their garments, O'Reilly spoke what was in his mind.

"I'm getting about fed up on Leslie," he declared. "He's the world's champion crêpe-hanger, and he's

painted the whole world such a deep, despondent blue that I'm completely dismal. You've got to take him off my hands."

Judson grunted. "What ails him?"

"Well, he wears a wreath of immortelles day and night. Haven't you guessed why he runs such desperate chances? He's sick—thinks he's going to die, anyhow, and wants to finish the job quick. I'm the one who has to endure him."

"Suicide?"

"It amounts to that."

"The devil!" Judson pondered for a moment. "Can't you cheer him up?"

"I?" O'Reilly lifted his hands in a gesture of helplessness. "When I try he gets sore at my heartless indifference; when I sympathize he declares I'm nudging him closer to his grave—says I'm kicking the crutches out from under him. He's just plain vitriol. I—I'd rather live with an adder!"

O'Reilly's youthful *asistente*, who at the moment was painstakingly manufacturing a huge, black cigar for himself out of some purloined tobacco, pricked up his ears at the mention of Branch's name and now edged closer, exclaiming:

"*Caramba!* There's a hero for you. Meester Branch is the bravest man I ever seen. Our people call him 'El Demonio'!"

O'Reilly jerked his head toward the Cuban. "You see? He's made the hit of his life, and yet he resents it. The Cubans are beginning to think he carries a rabbit's foot."

"No rabbit's foot about it," the captain asserted. "He's just so blamed thin the Spaniards can't hit him; it's like shooting at the edge of a playing-card. Annie Oakley is the only one who can do that."

"Well, my nerves are frayed out. I've argued myself

hoarse, but he misconstrues everything I say. I wish you'd convince him that he has a chance to get well; it might alter his disposition. If *something* doesn't alter it I'll be court-martialed for shooting a man in his sleep—and I'll hit him, right in the middle, no matter how slim he is." O'Reilly compressed his lips firmly.

The *asistente*, who had finished rolling his cigar, now lighted it and repeated: "Yes, sir, Meester Branch is the bravest man I ever seen. You remember that first battle, eh? Those Spaniards seen him comin' and threw down their guns and beat it. Jesus Cristo! I laugh to skill myself that day."

"Jacket" was at once the youngest and the most profane member of Colonel Lopez's entire command. The most shocking oaths fell from his beardless lips whenever he opened them to speak English, and O'Reilly's efforts to break the boy of the habit proved quite unavailing.

"Colonel Miguel," continued Jacket, "he say if he's got a hunnerd sick men like El Demonio he'll march to Habana. By God! What you think of that?"

Judson rolled in his hammock until his eyes rested upon the youth. Then he said, "You're quite a man of arms yourself, for a half-portion."

"Eh?" The object of this remark was not quite sure that he understood.

"I mean you're a pretty good fighter, for a little fellow."

"Hell, yes!" agreed the youth. "I can fight."

"Better look out that some big Spaniard doesn't carry you off in his pocket and eat you," O'Reilly warned; at which the boy grinned and shook his head. He was just becoming accustomed to the American habit of banter, and was beginning to like it.

"Jacket would make a bitter mouthful," Judson ventured.

The lad smiled gently and drew on his huge cigar.

"You betcher life. That —— —— Spaniard would spit me out quick enough."

This Camagueyan boy was a character. He was perhaps sixteen, and small for his age—a mere child, in fact. Nevertheless, he was a seasoned veteran, and his American camp-mates had grown exceedingly fond of him. He was a pretty, graceful youngster; his eyes were large and soft and dark; his face was as sensitive and mobile as that of a girl; and yet, despite his youth, he had won a reputation for daring and ferocity quite as notable in its way as was the renown of Leslie Branch.

There were many of these immature soldiers among the Insurrectos, and most of them were in some way distinguished for valor. War, it seems, fattens upon the tenderest of foods, and every army has its boys—its wondrous, well-beloved infants, whom their older comrades tease, torment, and idolize. Impetuous, drunk with youth, and keeping no company with care, they form the very aristocracy of fighting forces. They gaily undertake the maddest of adventures; and by their examples they fire the courage of their maturer comrades. All history is spiced with their exploits.

Jacket was one of these, and he was perhaps the truest patriot of any soldier in Miguel Lopez's band; for liberty, to him, was not a mere abstraction or a principle, but something real, tangible, alive—something worthy of the highest sacrifice. In his person all the wrongs of Cuba burned perpetually. It mattered not that he himself had never suffered—his spirit was the spirit of his country, pure, exalted, undefiled. He stood for what the others fought for.

In order to expand his knowledge of English—of which, by the way, he was inordinately proud—Jacket had volunteered to serve as O'Reilly's striker, and the result had been a fast friendship. It was O'Reilly who had given the boy his nickname—a name prompted by a

marked eccentricity, for although Jacket possessed the two garments which constituted the ordinary Insurrecto uniform, he made a practice of wearing only one. On chilly nights, or on formal occasions, he wore both waistcoat and trousers, but at other times he dispensed entirely with the latter, and his legs went naked. They were naked now, as, with the modesty of complete unconsciousness, he squatted in the shade, puffing thoughtfully at his giant cheroot.

Once Jacket's mind was fastened upon any subject, it remained there, and after a time he continued:

"Yes, I bet I don't taste good to no Spaniard. Did I told you about that battle of Pino Bravo? Eh?" He turned his big brown eyes upward to O'Reilly. "*Cristo!* I skill more'n a dozen men that day!"

"Oh, Jacket!" the Americans cried. "You monstrous little liar!" commented O'Reilly.

"Si, señors," the boy went on, complacently. "That day I skill more'n six men. It was this way; we came on them from behind and they don't see us. Phui! We skill plenty, all right!"

"It was a hot scrimmage," Judson attested. "Some of Luque's niggers, those tall, lean, hungry fellows from Santiago, managed to hack their way through a wire fence and get behind a detachment of the enemy who had made a stand under a hill. They charged, and for a wonder they got close enough to use their machetes. It was bloody work—the kind you read about—no quarter. Somehow Jacket managed to be right in the middle of the butchery. He's a bravo kid, all right. Muy malo!"

There was a moment's silence, then Judson continued: "Funny thing happened afterward, though. Jacket had to do his turn at picket duty that night, and he got scared of the dark. We heard him squalling and screaming—"

Jacket started to his feet. "That's a dam' lie," he exclaimed, resentfully. "I'm not scared of no dark."

"Didn't you holler till you woke the whole camp?"

"I ain't scared of no dark," the boy repeated; but his pride, his complacency, had suddenly vanished. He dug his toes into the dirt; in his eyes were tears of mortification. His cigar had evidently become tasteless, for he removed it from his lips and gazed at it indifferently.

"Did you cry?" O'Reilly smiled; and the lad nodded reluctantly.

"Did he *cry?*" Judson echoed. "Why, we thought we were attacked. He put the whole camp in an uproar."

"What was the trouble, Jacket?"

"I—I was—" The boy's smooth brown cheeks paled, and his moist eyes dilated at the memory. "I ain't scared of any —— —— Spaniard when he's *alive*, but—it's different when he's dead. I could see dead ones everywhere!" He shuddered involuntarily. "They fetched me to General Gomez and—*Caramba!* he's mad. But after I tell him what I seen in the dark he say I don't have to go back there no more. He let me go to sleep 'longside of his hammock, and bimeby I quit cryin'. I ain't never stood no picket duty since that night. I won't do it."

It was plain that discussion of this unhappy subject was deeply distasteful to the youthful hero of Pino Bravo, for he edged away, and a moment later disappeared.

"Queer little youngster," Captain Judson said, meditatively. "He idolizes you."

O'Reilly nodded. "Yes, poor little kid. I wonder what will become of him after the war? After the war!" he mused. "I wonder if it will ever end."

"Humph! If we had more generals like Gomez and Garcia and Maceo—"

"We've got three better generals than they."

"You mean—"

"Generals June, July, and August."

"Oh yes!" The artilleryman nodded his understanding. "There's no end of yellow-jack among the Spaniards. Speaking of that, what do you think of Miss Evans's work in the field hospitals?"

Judson shifted his weight so that his eyes could rest upon a white tent which showed through the greenery at a distance; it was the one tent in all the encampment, and it had been erected that very morning to shelter Norine Evans, but just arrived from headquarters in the Cubitas hills. The captain's lids were half closed; his heavy, homely face was softened by a peculiar rapt expression. He did not seem to expect an answer to his question.

"I don't think much of it," O'Reilly confessed.

"You don't!" Judson brought himself back to earth with a start. "Humph! Well, I think it's perfectly wonderful. I think she's the most wonderful woman, and—" His voice died out; he turned once more in the direction of the tent.

O'Reilly smiled, understanding now the reason for his companion's reckless, almost frenzied use of soap and water that morning, and his cheerful stoicism in the hands of a volunteer barber more accustomed to the uses of a machete than a razor.

Evidently Judson had fallen, too—along with Major Ramos, and Colonel Lopez, and Leslie Branch, and all the rest. Well, it was to be expected. Before he had been a week in Cuba O'Reilly had noticed that Miss Evans was a mystery and a delight to nearly every man she met.

"So *you've* got it, eh?" he inquired.

"Got what?" Judson did not turn his eyes.

"It."

"It? If you can't talk English, talk Spanish."

O'Reilly was not perturbed by this gruffness. "I think her presence here is the silliest, the most scandalous thing I ever heard of," said he. "The idea of a girl of her

accomplishments, her means, alone in Cuba! Why, it's criminal!"

Judson's gunny-sacking hammock bulged beneath him. It threatened to give way as he sat up with a jerk and swung his bare legs over the side. His face was dark; he was scowling; his chin was pugnaciously outthrust and his voice rumbled as he exclaimed:

"The deuce it is! Say! I don't like the way you talk about that girl."

"You don't, eh?" O'Reilly eyed him quizzically. "Would you care to have your sister do what she's doing?"

"That's not the point. You can't compare her with ordinary women."

"Well, this isn't an ordinary environment for a woman, no matter who she is. These Cubans are bound to talk about her."

"*Are* they?" Judson glared at the speaker. "I'd like to hear 'em. I'd like to see somebody get fresh. Why, *say!*"—he clenched his powerful hands—"I'd fill their hospitals until they bulged." After a moment he continued: "I s'pose it's natural for you to worry, since you're responsible for her being here, in a way, but—" His tone changed, he relaxed and lay back in his hammock. "Oh, well, you're about the only man I can't hate."

"Jealous, are you? I didn't know you were in so deep."

The other shook his head. "Oh, I'm daffy. D'you think she'd have me?"

"Not a chance."

"Hey? Why not? I'm a good big husky—I'll get a Government job when the war is over and—"

"That's just the trouble. She'll fall for some poor, sickly unfortunate, with one leg. She's the sort that always does. She's the sort that has to have something to 'mother.' Lord, I'd give a good deal to see her safely back in New York!"

Judson, it seemed, had a better understanding of artillery than of women; he pondered O'Reilly's statement seriously, and his face clouded.

"Some sickly fellow. Some fellow like Branch, eh?" After a moment he continued, more hopefully: "Well, it won't be *him;* he'll soon be dead. There's some consolation in that. I could almost—"

O'Reilly motioned for silence, for at that moment Branch himself approached, his long face set in lines of discontent, even deeper than usual. He had been wandering about the camp in one of his restless fits, and now he began:

"Say, what do you think I've been doing?"

"I dun'no'," Captain Judson answered, morosely. "Cheering the sick and wounded; shedding smiles and sunshine as usual, I suppose?"

"Hunh! You're a funny guy, aren't you?—about as comical as a chloroform cone. You make me laugh, you do—just like a broken leg. Well, I've been looking up some grub for Miss Evans, and I can't find any."

"Can't find any?"

"Nothing fit for her to eat. You don't expect *her* to live on this infernal, eternal, and internal beef stew." Branch shuddered and gagged slightly. "I've eaten parts of animals that were never intended to be eaten. This rebel grub is killing *me.* What 'll it do to her?"

"Didn't Major Ramos bring anything along?" O'Reilly asked.

"He says there's a famine at Cubitas."

"We'd better look into this," Judson exclaimed, and, finding that his clothes were dry, he hurriedly began to dress himself.

Together, the three men made an investigation of the camp's resources, only to discover that Branch was right. There was, indeed, but little food of any kind, and that little was of the coarsest. Ordinarily, such a condition of

affairs would have occasioned them no surprise, for the men were becoming accustomed to a more or less chronic scarcity of provisions; but the presence of Norine Evans put quite a different complexion upon the matter. They were still discussing the situation when Miss Evans, having finished her afternoon nap, threw open the flaps of her tent and stepped out.

When she had listened to the account apologetically submitted by her three friends, she drew her brows together, saying, plaintively: "Oh dear! We've been going short for a week, and Major Ramos told me we'd fare better when we got here. I had my mouth all set for a banquet. Couldn't you even find the poor dog a bone?"

Norine was thinner and browner than when she had come to Cuba, but she in no way showed the effect of any serious or continued lack of nourishment. In fact, a simple diet and an outdoor life had agreed with her amazingly.

"I'm afraid the cupboard is bare," O'Reilly acknowledged.

"They're getting ready to slaughter another gutta-percha ox," Branch said, gloomily. "He's a veteran of the Ten Years' War. That means *stew* again! STEW! One puncture-proof, rubber ox and a bushel of sweet-potatoes for four hundred men!"

"Do you know what I want for dinner?" Norine inquired. "Lamb chops with green peas, some nice white bread, a salad, and coffee."

The three men looked at her anxiously. Judson stirred uneasily.

"That's what I *want*. I don't expect to get it."

With a sigh of relief the captain exclaimed, "I thought you were giving your order."

"Goodness, no!" With a laugh the girl seated herself upon her one camp-chair, inviting her callers to dispose

themselves on the ground about her. "If you can stand the food, I dare say I can. Now then, tell me what you've been doing since you left Cubitas. I've been frightened to death that some of you would be hurt. That's one reason why I've been working night and day helping to get the hospitals in shape. I can't bear to think of our boys being wounded."

"Not much chance of *our* getting shot," O'Reilly told her. "But Leslie—he needs a good talking to. He has gone into the hero business."

Branch uttered a disdainful grunt. "Nothing of the sort. I'm a sick man; if I'd rather get shot than suffer a slow death from neglect, it's my own business, isn't it? Imagine feeding an invalid on boiled bicycle tires! Gee! I'd like to have a meal of nice nourishing ptomaines for a change. Hero? Humph!"

Norine eyed the complainant critically, then said: "The diet agrees with you. You look better than you did."

Branch turned a somber glance upon her and gave vent to a bitter, sneering laugh. It was plain that he believed she, too, was attempting to pull the wool over his eyes. "I wish I could find some poisonous toadstools. I'd eat 'em raw."

"Listen," Norine went on. "Let's play a game. We'll imagine this is Delmonico's and we'll all take turns ordering the best things to eat that we can think of. The one who orders best, wins. We'll call the game—" She frowned thoughtfully.

"Call it 'Vittles,'" O'Reilly suggested.

"'Vittles' it is. Maybe it will give us an appetite for supper. Leslie, you begin. Come now, hand your hat to the hat-boy, then follow the head waiter. This way, sir. Table for one? Very good, sir. Here's a cool one, in front of the electric fan. We have an exceptional selection of cold dishes to-day, sir. Perhaps you would like a nice halibut salad—"

"No halibut salad," Branch answered, striving valiantly to enter into the spirit of Norine's pretending. "I had it for breakfast. And say, turn off that fan; I'm just back from Cuba. Now then, you may bring me some oysters—"

"Oysters are out of season," O'Reilly murmured, politely, "but our clams are very fine."

"Some oysters," Branch insisted, stubbornly. "After that, a cup of chicken broth, a grilled sweetbread, and toast Melba."

Joe Judson put an abrupt end to the invalid's meal by hurling a clod at him, crying: "You're in Delmonico's, not in Battle Creek. Let somebody order who knows how. We'll have steak and onions all around."

"I want strawberries!" Norine cried. "They're ripe now. Strawberries and cream— Oh-h! Think of it!"

There was a tense silence, which O'Reilly broke by saying, "I guess 'Vittles' isn't a very good game, after all."

"It doesn't seem to fill *my* wants," the girl acknowledged. "Let's talk about something else."

Miss Evans did seem truly concerned for the welfare of her "boys," as she termed the little group of Americans whom she had met, and she showed, by asking numerous questions, that her interest was keen.

The men were glad to talk and she soon gained an insight into the peculiar, aimless, unsatisfactory, and yet effective method of warfare practised by the Insurrecto armies; they told her of the endless marches and countermarches, the occasional skirmishes, the feints, the inconclusive engagements which were all a part of the general strategy—operations which served to keep the enemy constantly on guard, like a blind swordsman, and would, it was hoped, eventually wear down his patience and endurance. In her turn, Norine related something of what she was doing and how her labor of mercy progressed.

"I'm nearly discouraged," she confessed, finally.

"Everything is so different to what I thought it would be, and I'm so weak and ineffective. The medical supplies I brought are nearly all gone, and I've learned what hard work it is fitting up hospitals when there's nothing to fit them up with. I can't teach these people to take care of themselves—they seem to consider precautions against disease as a confession of cowardice. Summer, the yellow-fever season, is here and—well, I'm getting disheartened. Disheartened and hungry! They're new sensations to me." She sighed. "I imagined I was going to work wonders—I thought I was going to be a Florence Nightingale, and the men were going to idolize me."

"Don't they?" Judson demanded.

"No. That is—not in exactly the way I expected."

"They all want to marry her," O'Reilly explained.

"Insolent bunch!" growled the captain. Then he swallowed hard and said, "But for that matter, so do *I*."

"Why, Joe!" Norine cast a startled glance at the big fellow.

"It's a fact," he asserted, doggedly. "I might as well declare myself here and now. There's always a gang of eavesdroppers hanging around you."

"He means you, Leslie," O'Reilly said. "Hadn't you better take a walk?"

Branch rolled a hostile eye at the artilleryman, and his lip curled. "I'll not move. When he gets through, I'll propose."

"How silly you boys can be!" Norine laughed. "I dare say the others are joking too, but—"

"Joking?" O'Reilly grinned. "Not at all. I'm the only single man in camp who isn't in love with you. When you arrived this morning there was a general stampede for the river. I'll bet the fish in this stream will taste of soap for years to come."

As if to point O'Reilly's words at the moment appeared

Colonel Lopez, shaved blood-raw and clad in a recently laundered uniform which was still damp. The three Americans rose to salute him, but discipline was lax and he waved them back to their seats. Other eyes than his, too, had noted Miss Evans's reappearance after her siesta, for Major Ramos, Norine's escort from headquarters, soon joined the group, and he was followed by two Camagueyan lieutenants.

These latter were youths of some family standing. Before the war they had been dandies, and they still had an excellent opinion of their physical charms, but, unfortunately, they spoke no English and hence their attentions to Norine had been somewhat vague and pointless. They possessed eloquent eyes, however, and now they languished melting glances upon her, the meaning of which she had no difficulty in translating.

"We've been talking about food," Leslie Branch advised his commanding officer. "Miss Evans isn't a burning patriot like the rest of us, and so of course she can't share our ravenous appetite for beef cooked and eaten on the hoof."

"So?" Lopez's handsome face clouded. "You are hungry, then?"

Norine confessed that she was. "I'm starving!" said she. "I haven't had a decent meal for a week."

"God be praised! I know where there is a goat, not two leagues away!" said the colonel.

"But I don't want a goat," Norine complained. "I want—well, pickles, and jam, and sardines, and—candy, and—tooth-powder! Real boarding-school luxuries. I'd just like to rob a general store."

Lopez furrowed his brows and lost himself in thought. Later, while the others were talking, he drew Ramos aside and for a while they kept their heads together; then they invited Judson to join their council.

It was not until perhaps an hour later that O'Reilly

had a chance for a confidential talk with Norine, for in the mean time other officers came to pay their respects. But when the last one had reluctantly departed he said:

"I've been talking to Joe about you, and I don't think it's right for you to be running around alone this way."

"You know how mad that sort of talk makes me," she warned him.

"Yes. Just the same, I'll never feel easy until you're safe home again. And I'll never stop bothering you until—"

"In the first place, I'm not alone. I take a woman with me everywhere, a Mrs. Ruiz."

"Bah! She's no more of a chaperon than I am."

Norine uttered an impatient exclamation. "Is this a time to consider such things?"

"Oh, I dare say the nature of your work is unconventional and excuses a good deal, but you don't understand the Latin mind as I do. These Cubans have different standards than ours. They're very apt to think—"

"I don't care what they think," the girl declared, "so long as *I* think I'm doing right. That's final."

There was a brief pause. Then O'Reilly admitted: "I'm not seriously concerned over that part of it, either, for you are the best judge of what is right and proper. What does concern me, however, is the effect all this may have upon you, yourself. You're impractical, romantic" —Norine laughed shortly, but he went on, stubbornly— "and just the sort of girl to be carried away by some extravagant impulse."

"What makes you think I'm impractical and romantic?"

"You wouldn't be here, otherwise."

"Very well. What are you trying to get at? What do you mean by 'some extravagant impulse'?"

"I'm afraid"—O'Reilly hesitated, then voiced a fear which had troubled him more than he cared to acknowledge—"I'm afraid of some silly entanglement, some love affair—"

Norine's laughter rang out, spontaneous, unaffected. It served to relieve the momentary tension which had sprung up between them.

"All these men are attracted to you, as it is quite natural they should be," O'Reilly hurried on. "I'm worried to death for fear you'll forget that you're too blamed good for any of them."

"What a conscientious duenna you are!" she told him, "but rest easy; I'm thoroughly homesick, and ready to flunk it all at the first good excuse. I'll make you a promise, Johnnie. If I decide to fall in love with any of these ragged heroes I'll choose you. Most of them think there is something between us, anyhow."

"I don't quite understand how I manage to resist you," O'Reilly told her, "for I think you're perfectly splendid. Probably that's why I'd hate to see you married to some one-legged veteran of this amateur war."

"Women don't marry legs," she told him, lightly. Then, more seriously, she asked, "What are you doing about Rosa?"

"I'm waiting to hear from Matanzas Province. When I joined the army I had to go where I was sent, of course, but General Gomez has started inquiries, and as soon as I learn something definite I shall follow it up. I shall go where the trail leads."

"You still have hope?"

He nodded. "I refuse to let myself doubt."

When O'Reilly joined Judson for supper the latter met him with a broad grin on his face. "Well," said he, "it seems you started something with your game of 'Vittles.' You can get ready to saddle up when the moon rises."

"What do you mean?"

"The colonel took Miss Evans at her word. We're going to raid San Antonio de los Baños—two hundred of us—to get her some pickles, and jam, and candy, and tooth-powder."

XIX

THAT SICK MAN FROM SAN ANTONIO

CERTAIN histories of the Cuban War for Independence speak of "The Battle of San Antonio de los Baños." They relate how one thousand patriots captured the village after a gallant and sanguinary resistance by its Spanish garrison; how they released the prisoners in the local jail, replenished their own supplies, and then retired in the face of enemy reinforcements. It is quite a stirring story to read and it has but one fault, a fault, by the way, not uncommon in histories—it is mainly untrue.

In the first place, the engagement was in no sense a battle, but merely a raid. The number of troops engaged was, perhaps, one-fifth of the generous total ascribed by the historians, and as a military manœuver it served no purpose whatsoever. That the Cubans delivered a spirited attack there is no denying. As a matter of fact, the engagement was characterized by an abandon, by a lack of caution, truly sensational, the reason being that the Insurrectos were half starved and stormed the town much as hungry hoboes attack a lunch-counter. Nevertheless, since the affair had a direct bearing upon the fortunes of several people connected with this story, it is, perhaps, worth relating.

The Baths of St. Anthony consisted of a sulphur spring which for many years had been held in high regard by gouty and rheumatic Camagueyans; around this spring a

village had arisen which boasted rather better shops than the ordinary country town. It was this fact which had induced the gallant and obliging Colonel Lopez to attack it, for, as he explained to his American friends, if any place outside of Habana was likely to contain pickles, jam, sardines, candy, tooth-powder, and such other delicacies as appeared necessary to the contentment of a visiting American lady, San Antonio de los Baños was the one. Colonel Lopez did not believe in half measures: once he had determined to prove his devotion to Norine Evans, he would have sacrificed himself and the flower of his command; he would have wasted his last precious three-pound shell in breaching the walls of San Antonio de los Baños rather than fail. But as a matter of fact the village had no walls and it was defended only by a couple of blockhouses. Therefore the colonel left his artillery behind.

Perhaps its name was the most impressive thing about San Antonio de los Baños. Its streets were narrow and steep and stony, and its flinty little plaza was flanked by stores of the customary sort, the fronts of which were open so that mounted customers from the country might ride in to make their purchases. Crowning two commanding eminences just outside the village limits were the loopholed *fortinas*, where for months past the Spanish garrison had been dozing.

Lopez and his troop approached the town in the early morning. As they deployed for the attack the colonel issued private instructions to certain members of his command.

"O'Reilly, you and Señor Branch will enter one grocery-store after another. You will purchase that jam, those sardines, and whatever else you think Miss Evans would like. Captain Judson, you and Major Ramos will go to the apothecary-shop—I understand there is a very good one—and look for tooth-powder and candy and the like.

I shall see that the streets are cleared, then I shall endeavor to discover some pickles; but as God is my judge, I doubt if there is such a thing this side of Habana."

Leslie Branch, whose temper had not improved with the long night ride, inquired, caustically: "Do you expect us to buy the groceries? Well, I'm broke, and so is O'Reilly."

"Have you no money?" asked the colonel, vastly surprised.

"I haven't tipped my hat to a dollar since I quit newspaper work. What's more, I want to do a little shopping for myself."

O'Reilly agreed: "If you don't give us some change, Colonel, we'll have to open a charge account in your name."

"*Carmaba!*" muttered Lopez. "I intended to borrow from you gentlemen. Well, never mind—we'll commandeer what we wish in the name of the Republic."

Lopez's attack proved a complete surprise, both to the citizens and to the garrison of the town. The rebel bugle gave the first warning of what was afoot, and before the Castilian troops who were loitering off duty could regain their quarters, before the citizens could take cover or the shopkeepers close and bar their heavy wooden shutters, two hundred ragged horsemen were yelling down the streets.

There followed a typical Cuban engagement—ten shouts to one shot. There was a mad charge on the heels of the scurrying populace, a scattering pop-pop of rifles, cheers, cries, shrieks of defiance and far-flung insults directed at the *fortinas*.

Bugles blew on the hilltops; the defenders armed themselves and began to fire into the village. But since the Insurrectos were now well sheltered by the houses and only a portion of certain streets could be raked from the forts, the Spanish bullets did no harm. Obedient to orders, a number of Lopez's men dismounted and took

positions whence they could guard against a sally, thus leaving the rest of the command free to raid the stores. In the outskirts of the town Mausers spoke, the dust leaped, and leaden messengers whined through the air.

As locusts settle upon a standing crop, so did the army of liberators descend upon the shops of San Antonio de los Baños. It was great fun, great excitement, while it lasted, for the town was distracted and its citizens had neither time nor inclination to resist. Some of the shopkeepers, indeed, to prove their loyalty, openly welcomed the invaders. Others, however, lacking time to close up, fled incontinently, leaving their goods unguarded.

O'Reilly, with Branch and Jacket close at his heels, whirled his horse into the first *bodega* he came to. The store was stocked with general merchandise, but its owner, evidently a Spaniard, did not tarry to set a price upon any of it. As the three horsemen came clattering in at the front he went flying out at the rear, and, although O'Reilly called reassuringly after him, his only answer was the slamming of a back door, followed by swiftly diminishing cries of fright. Plainly, that rush of ragged men, those shots, those ferocious shouts from the plaza, were too much for the peaceful shopkeeper and his family, and they had taken refuge in some neighbor's garden.

There was no time to waste. Johnnie dismounted and, walking to the shelves where some imported canned goods were displayed, he began to select those delicacies for which he had been sent. The devoted Jacket was at his side. The little Cuban exercised no restraint; he seized whatever was most handy, meanwhile cursing ferociously, as befitted a bloodthirsty bandit. Boys are natural robbers, and at this opportunity for loot Jacket's soul flamed savagely and he swept the shelves bare as he went.

"Hey, Leslie! Get something to carry this stuff in," O'Reilly directed over his shoulder. Receiving only a

muttered reply, he turned to find that his fellow-countryman had cut down a string of perhaps two dozen large straw sombreros and was attempting to select one that fitted his head.

"Oh, look!" Branch murmured. "Forty dollars' worth of lids, but—all too small. They must have been made on the head of a cane."

"Take the whole string, but get us something to wrap up this grub in. Hurry!"

Spurred by O'Reilly's tone and by a lively rattle of rifle-shots outside, Leslie disappeared into the living-quarters at the back of the store. A moment later he emerged with a huge armful of bedclothes, evidently snatched at random. Trailing behind him, like a bridal veil, was a mosquito-net, which in his haste he had torn from its fastenings.

"I guess this is poor!" he exulted. "Bedding! Pillows! Mosquito-net! I'll sleep comfortable after this."

From somewhere came the faint smothered wailing of a baby—eloquent testimony of the precipitate haste with which the terrified storekeeper and his wife had fled. Dumping his burden of sheets, blankets, and brilliantly colored cotton quilts upon the floor, Branch selected two of the stoutest and began to knot the corners together.

He had scarcely finished when Judson reined in at the door and called to O'Reilly: "We've cleaned out the drug-store. Better get a move on you, for we may have to run any minute. I've just heard about some Cuban prisoners in the calaboose. Gimme a hand and we'll let 'em out."

"Sure!" O'Reilly quickly remounted, meanwhile directing Jacket to load the canned goods upon his horse and ride for the open country. He looked back a few moments later, to see his *asistente* emerge from the *bodega* perched between two queer-looking improvised saddle-bags bulging with plunder. The pony was overloaded,

but in obedience to the frantic urgings of its barelegged rider it managed to break into a shambling trot. Branch reappeared, too, looping the eight-foot string of straw hats to his saddle-horn, and balancing before him the remainder of the bedding, done up in a gaudy quilt.

Sharing in the general consternation at the attack, the jail guards had disappeared, leaving Lopez's men free to break into the prison. When O'Reilly joined them the work was well under way. The municipal building of San Antonio was a thick-walled structure with iron-barred windows and stout doors; but the latter soon gave way, and the attackers poured in. Seizing whatever implements they could find, Judson and O'Reilly went from cell to cell, battering, prying, smashing, leaving their comrades to rescue the inmates. This jail was a poor affair. It could scarcely be dignified by the name of a prison; nevertheless, true prison conditions prevailed in it and it was evidently conducted in typically Spanish fashion. The corridors were dark and odorous, the cells unspeakably foul; O'Reilly and Judson saw, heard, smelled enough to convince them that no matter how guilty the prisoners might be they had been amply punished for their crimes.

This, too, was swift work. The building echoed to rushing, yelling men, while outside a fitful accompaniment of gun-shots urged the rescuers to greater haste. While the Americans smashed lock after lock, their comrades dragged the astonished inmates from their kennels, hustled them into the street, and took them up behind their saddles.

The raid was over, "retreat" was sounding, when Judson and O'Reilly ran out of the prison, remounted, and joined their comrades, who were streaming back toward the plaza.

"Whew!" Judson wiped the sweat out of his eyes. "No chance to ask these fellows what they were in for."

"No need to ask them," said Johnnie. "A month in there would be too much for a murderer."

"The druggist said most of 'em are just patriots, and every holiday the Spaniards shoot one or two. There's no cock-fighting, so it's the only Sunday amusement they have. Did you notice that sick guy?"

"Yes."

"He looked to me like he was plain starved. Our fellows had to carry him."

Colonel Lopez galloped up to inquire, anxiously, "Did you find those eatables, eh?"

"Yes, sir, and a lot more."

"Good! But I failed. Pickles? *Caramba!* Nobody here ever heard of one!"

"Did we lose any men?" Judson asked.

"Not one. But Ramos was badly cut."

"So? Then he got to close quarters with some Spaniard?"

"Oh no!" The colonel grinned. "He was in too great a hurry and broke open a show-case with his fist."

The retreating Cubans still maintained their uproar, discharging their rifles into the air, shrieking defiance at their invisible foes, and voicing insulting invitations to combat. This ferocity, however, served only to terrify further the civil population and to close the shutters of San Antonio the tighter. Meanwhile, the loyal troops remained safely in their blockhouses, pouring a steady fire into the town. And despite this admirable display of courage the visitors showed a deep respect for their enemies' markmanship, taking advantage of whatever shelter there was.

Leslie Branch, of course, proved the solitary exception; as usual, he exposed himself recklessly and rode the middle of the streets, regardless of those sudden explosions of dust beneath his horse's feet or those unexpected showers of plaster from above.

He had spent his time assiduously ransacking the deserted shops, and in addition to his huge bundle of bedding

and his long string of straw hats he now possessed a miscellaneous assortment of plunder, in which were a bolt of calico, a pair of shoes, a collection of cooking-utensils, an umbrella, and—strangest of all—a large gilt-framed mirror. The safety of these articles seemed to concern him far more than his own. Spying O'Reilly, he shouted:

"Say! What's the Spanish word for 'clothing-store'? I need a new suit."

"Don't be an idiot!" Johnnie yelled at him. "Keep under cover."

But Branch only shook his head. "They couldn't hit anything," he cried.

The next instant, as if to punctuate his remark, a spent bullet smashed the mirror and sprinkled the speaker with particles of glass. It was only by a miracle that he escaped injury. Branch reined in his horse, examined the wreck, then with a petulant exclamation cast the useless frame away.

"Come on, Johnnie," Judson growled. "The damn fool wants to get shot."

The sick man's bravado roused in O'Reilly a feeling of mingled resentment and apprehension, but further warning would obviously be a waste of breath. Nevertheless, being a little too tender-hearted to follow Judson's nonchalant example and ride on, O'Reilly held in his horse, meanwhile keeping an anxious eye upon his friend.

The latter was in no hurry; he jogged along leisurely, evidently on the lookout for an opportunity to replenish his wardrobe. Truth to say, this needed replenishing—Leslie resembled a scarecrow clad in a suit of soiled pajamas. But by this time most of the shops had their shutters up. When the last one had been left behind O'Reilly spurred his horse into a gallop, relieved to know that the worst was over.

The raiders had approached San Antonio de los Baños across the fields at the rear, but Colonel Lopez led their

retreat by way of the *camino real* which followed the river-bank. This road for a short distance was exposed to the fire from one fort; then it was sheltered by a bit of rising ground.

O'Reilly, among the last to cross the zone of fire, was just congratulating himself upon the fortunate outcome of the skirmish when he saw Colonel Lopez ride to the crest of a knoll, rise in his stirrups and, lifting his cupped hands to his lips, direct a loud shout back toward the town. Lopez was followed by several of his men, who likewise began to yell and to wave their arms excitedly.

Johnnie turned to discover that Leslie Branch had lagged far behind, and now, as if to cap his fantastic performances, had dismounted and was descending the river-bank to a place where a large washing had been spread upon the stones to dry. He was quite exposed, and a spiteful crackle from the nearest blockhouse showed that the Spaniards were determined to bring him down. Mauser bullets ricocheted among the rocks—even from this distance their sharp explosions were audible—others broke the surface of the stream into little geysers, as if a school of fish were leaping.

While Johnnie looked on in breathless apprehension Branch appropriated several suits that promised to fit him; then he climbed up the bank, remounted his horse, and ambled slowly out of range.

Now this was precisely the sort of harebrained exploit which delights a Cuban audience. When Leslie rejoined his comrades, therefore, he was greeted with shouts and cheers.

"*Caramba!* He would risk his life for a clean shirt. . . . There's a fellow for you! He enjoys the hum of these Spanish bees! . . . *Bravo!* Tell us what the bullets said to you," they cried, crowding around him in an admiring circle.

O'Reilly, unable to contain himself, burst forth in a

rage: "You infernal fool! Do you want to be shot robbing a clothes-line?"

"Rats!" ejaculated Leslie, sourly. "I *told* you I had to have some clothes."

"Lopez ought to court-martial you. What are you going to do with that junk, now that you have it? You can't take it with you on the march."

"You wait and see," said the other. "I'm going to be comfortable, if—" He paused, with a peculiar, startled expression on his face. "Did you hear anything?" he queried after a moment.

"No. What?"

"Oh, nothing." The two men rode on in silence for a time, then Leslie said: "Queer thing happened back there while those Romeos were popping at me. I heard a baby crying."

"A baby?"

"Sure. I suppose it was the washerwoman's kid. When we flushed her she probably vamped out and left it in the grass. Anyhow, it let up an awful holler."

Jacket and the other loot-laden soldiers had been sent on ahead, together with those troopers who were sharing mounts with the rescued prisoners; they were now waiting perhaps two miles from town for their companions to overtake them. As the column came up and halted, O'Reilly addressed a remark to Leslie Branch, but in the middle of it the faint, unmistakable complaint of a child came to his ears.

"Listen!" he exclaimed. "What on earth—"

"I've been hearing it right along," Branch said. "I—I thought I had the willies."

The nearest riders abruptly ceased their chatter; they questioned one another mutely, doubting their own ears.

Again came that thin, muffled wail, whereupon O'Reilly cried in astonishment:

"Leslie! Why, it—it's in *your bundle!*" He pointed

to the formless roll of bedding which hung from his friend's saddle-horn.

"G'wan! You're crazy!" Branch slipped to the ground, seized the bundle in his arms, and bore it to the roadside. With shaking hands he tugged at the knotted corners of the comforter. "Pure imagination!" he muttered, testily. "There's nothing in here but bedclothes. I just grabbed an armful—" The last word ended in a yell. Leslie sprang into the air as if his exploring fingers had encountered a coiled serpent. "Oh, my God!" He poised as if upon the point of flight. "Johnnie! Look! It's *alive!*"

"What's alive? What is it?"

With a sudden desperate courage Branch bent forward and spread out the bedding. There, exposed to the bulging eyes of the onlookers, was a very tiny, very brown baby. It was a young baby; it was quite naked. Its eyes, exposed to the sudden glare of the morning sun, closed tightly; one small hand all but lost itself in the wide, toothless cavity that served as a mouth. Its ten ridiculous toes curled and uncurled in a most amazing fashion.

"Oh, my God!" Branch repeated, aghast. "It's just b-born! Its eyes aren't open."

The Cubans, who had momentarily been stricken dumb with amazement, suddenly broke into voluble speech. The clamor served to attract Colonel Lopez, who was riding past.

"What's the matter here?" he demanded, forcing his horse through the ring which had formed about El Demonio and his bundle. One startled look and the colonel flung himself out of his saddle. "Whose baby is that?" he demanded.

"I—I— Why, it's mine. I mean, I—" Branch's eyes were glued upon the child in horrified fascination. He choked and stammered and waved his hands impotently.

BRANCH'S EYES WERE GLUED UPON THE CHILD IN HORRIFIED FASCINATION

"Come, come! Speak up! What does this mean?" Lopez's voice grew stern.

"She must have be-been asleep. I just grabbed—You know. I—" Branch's face became suddenly stricken. "Look out!" he shouted, hoarsely. "She's going to cry, or something."

He was right; the baby showed every sign of a firm determination to voice her indignation at the outrage she had suffered. Her hand stole out of her mouth, her fists closed, her face puckered ominously. Lopez stooped, wrapped her in a sheet, then took her awkwardly in his arms. He bent a blazing glance upon the kidnapper, but he had no chance to speak before the storm of wailings broke.

News of Leslie's exploit was spreading. Men were shouting and gesticulating to their comrades to come and see El Demonio's spoils. There was a great chattering and crowding and no little smothered laughter. Meanwhile, Colonel Lopez was using every desperate device to soothe the infant, but without success. At last he strode up to Leslie and extended his burden.

"Here," he said, harshly, "she's yours. I surrender her."

Leslie drew back. "No, you don't! I wouldn't touch her for a thousand dollars!" he cried.

But Lopez was firm. He spoke in a tone of command: "Do as I tell you. Take her. A fine outrage, to steal a baby! What are we going to do with her? We can't send her back—the town is crazy. I've no doubt I shall hear from this."

In spite of Leslie's choking protests, in spite of his feeble resistance, Lopez pressed the noisy stranger into his arms, then turned to his men and directed them to be off.

Branch remained motionless. He was stupefied; he held the baby gingerly, not daring to put it down, dread-

ing to keep it; his eyes were rolling, he began to perspire freely. Stretching a timid, detaining hand toward Lopez, he inquired, huskily, "What shall I do with her?"

"God knows. I don't," snapped the officer. "I shall have to think, but meanwhile I hold you responsible for her. Come now, we must be going."

Leslie swallowed hard; his face became overspread with a sicklier pallor. "What 'll I do—when she gets *hungry?*"

Lopez could not restrain a smile. ' You should have thought about that, compadre. Well, I know where there is a milk cow not three leagues from here. I'll send a man to borrow it from the owner and drive it to our camp. Or perhaps"—his handsome face hardened again—"perhaps you would prefer to take this child back where you found it?"

"No— I— Oh, they'd tear me limb from limb!"

"Exactly."

Branch turned his head from side to side in desperation. He wet his lips. "It's the youngest one I ever had anything to do with. Maybe it isn't used to cow's milk," he ventured.

"Unfortunately that is the only kind I can offer it. Take care of it until I find some way of notifying its people."

O'Reilly had looked on at his friend's embarrassment with malicious enjoyment, but, realizing that Branch would undoubtedly try to foist upon him the responsibility of caring for the baby, he slipped away and rode over to where Captain Judson was engaged in making a litter upon which to carry the sick prisoner they had rescued from the jail. When he had apprised the artilleryman of what Branch had found in his roll of purloined bedding the latter smiled broadly.

"Serves him right," Judson chuckled. "We'll make him sit up nights with it. Maybe it 'll improve his disposition." More seriously he explained: "This chap

here is all in. I'm afraid we aren't going to get him through."

Following Judson's glance, O'Reilly beheld an emaciated figure lying in the shade of a near-by guava-bush. The man was clad in filthy rags, his face was dirty and overgrown with a month's beard; a pair of restless eyes stared unblinkingly at the brazen sky. His lips were moving; from them issued a steady patter of words, but otherwise he showed no sign of life.

"You said he was starving." Johnnie dismounted and lent Judson a hand with his task.

"That's what I thought at first, but he's sick. I suppose it's that damned dungeon fever."

"Then we'd better look after him ourselves. These Cubans are mighty careless, you know. We can swing him between our horses, and—"

Judson looked up to discover that Johnnie was poised rigidly, his mouth open, his hands halted in midair. The sick man's voice had risen, and O'Reilly, with a peculiar expression of amazement upon his face, was straining his ears to hear what he said.

"Eh? What's the matter?" Judson inquired.

For a moment O'Reilly remained frozen in his attitude, then without a word he strode to the sufferer. He bent forward, staring into the vacant, upturned face. A cry burst from his throat, a cry that was like a sob, and, kneeling, he gathered the frail, filthy figure into his arms.

"*Estéban!*" he cried. "*Estéban!* This is O'Reilly. O'Rail-ye! Don't you know me? O'Reilly, your friend, your brother! For God's sake, tell me what they've done to you! Look at me, Estéban! Look at me! *Look at me!* Oh, *Estéban!*"

Such eagerness, such thankfulness, such passionate pity were in his friend's hoarse voice that Judson drew closer. He noticed that the faintest flame of reason flickered for an instant in the sick man's hollow eyes; then they began

to rove again, and the same rustling whisper recommenced. Judson had heard something of O'Reilly's story; he had heard mention of Estéban and Rosa Varona; he stood, therefore, in silent wonderment, listening to the incoherent words that poured from his friend's lips. O'Reilly held the boy tenderly in his arms; tears rolled down his cheeks as he implored Estéban to hear and to heed him.

"*Try* to hear me! *Try!*" There was fierce agony in the cry. "Where is Rosa? . . . Rosa? . . . You're safe now; you can tell me. . . . You're safe with O'Reilly. . . . I came back . . . I came back for you and Rosa. . . . Where is she? . . . Is she—dead?"

Other men were assembling now. The column was ready to move, but Judson signaled to Colonel Lopez and made known the identity of the sick stranger. The colonel came forward swiftly and laid a hand upon O'Reilly's shoulder, saying:

"So! You were right, after all. Estéban Varona didn't die. God must have sent us to San Antonio to deliver him."

"He's sick, *sick!*" O'Reilly said, huskily. "Those Spaniards! Look what they've done to him." His voice changed. He cried, fiercely: "Well, I'm late again. I'm always just a little bit too late. He'll die before he can tell me—"

"Wait! Take hold of yourself. We'll do all that can be done to save him. Now come, we must be going, or all San Antonio will be upon us."

O'Reilly roused. "Put him in my arms," he ordered. "I'll carry him to camp myself."

But Lopez shook his head, saying, gently: "It's a long march, and the litter would be better for him. Thank Heaven we have an angel of mercy awaiting us, and she will know how to make him well."

When the troop resumed its retreat Estéban Varona lay

suspended upon a swinging bed between O'Reilly's and Judson's horses. Although they carried him as carefully as they could throughout that long hot journey, he never ceased his babbling and never awoke to his surroundings.

XX

EL DEMONIO'S CHILD

DURING the next few days O'Reilly had reason to bless the happy chance which had brought Norine Evans to Cuba. During the return journey from San Antonio de los Baños he had discovered how really ill Estéban Varona was, how weak his hold upon life. The young man showed the marks of wasting illness and of cruel abuse; starvation, neglect, and disease had all but done for him. After listening to his ravings, O'Reilly began to fear that the poor fellow's mind was permanently affected. It was an appalling possibility, one to which he could not reconcile himself. To think that somewhere in that fevered brain was perhaps locked the truth about Rosa's fate, if not the secret of her whereabouts, and yet to be unable to wring an intelligent answer to a single question, was intolerable. The hours of that ride were among the longest O'Reilly had ever passed.

But Norine Evans gave him new heart. She took complete charge of the sick man upon his arrival in camp; then in her brisk, matter-of-fact way she directed O'Reilly to go and get some much-needed rest. Estéban was ill, very ill, she admitted; there was no competent doctor near, and her own facilities for nursing were primitive indeed; nevertheless, she expressed confidence that she could cure him, and reminded O'Reilly that nature has a blessed way of building up a resistance to environment. As a result of her good cheer O'Reilly managed to enjoy a night's sleep.

Leslie Branch was later than the others in arriving, for the baby proved to be a trial and a handicap. His comrades had refused him any assistance on the homeward journey. They expressed a deep, hoarse condemnation of his conduct, and pretended to consider that he had sacrificed all claims to their friendship and regard.

Branch took this seriously, and he was in a state bordering upon desperation when he reached camp. In the hope of unloading his unwelcome burden upon Norine Evans he hurried directly to her tent. But Norine had heard the story; Lopez had warned her; therefore she waved him away.

"Don't ask me to mother your stolen child," she said.

"Oh, but you've *got* to," he declared in a panic. "You've just *got* to."

"Well, I won't. In the first place, I have a sick man in my tent."

"But look! Listen! This baby dislikes me. I've nearly dropped it a dozen times. I—I'm going to leave it, anyhow."

But Norine remained firm in her refusal. "You sha'n't leave your foundling at *my* door. If you intend to steal babies you should make up your mind to take care of them." She was itching to seize the hungry little mite, but she restrained the impulse. "Go ahead and keep it amused until the cow arrives," she told him.

"Keep it *amused!* Amuse a starving brat!" tragically cried the man. "In Heaven's name, how?"

"Why, play with it, cuddle it, give it your watch—anything! But don't allow it to cry—it may injure itself."

Branch glared resentfully; then he changed his tactics and began to plead. "Oh, Norine!" he implored. "I—just can't do it. I'm all fagged out now, and, besides, I've got the only watch in camp that keeps time. I didn't sleep any last night, and it 'll keep me awake all to-night. It's a nice baby, really. It needs a woman—"

Norine parted the flaps of her tent and pointed inside, where Estéban Varona lay upon her cot. His eyes were staring; his lips were moving. "Mrs. Ruiz and I will have our hands full with that poor chap. For all we know, he may have some contagious disease."

Branch was utterly shameless, utterly selfish and uncompassionate. "I'm sick, too—sicker than he is. Have a heart! Remember, I risked my life to get you something nice to eat—"

"Yes! The most ridiculous procedure I ever heard of. What ever made you do such a crazy thing?" Norine was honestly indignant now.

"I did it for you. It seems to me that the least you can do in return—"

"The least, and the most, I can do is to try and save this poor man's life," she firmly reasserted. "Now run along. I'd take the baby if I could, but I simply can't."

"It 'll die on me," Branch protested.

"Nonsense! It's the healthiest little thing I ever saw. Wait until it has its supper. You'll see." She disappeared into her tent and Branch reluctantly turned away.

Next he bore the infant to Judson and O'Reilly in turn; but both gruffly refused to assume the least responsibility for it. In the matter of advice concerning its welfare, however, they were more obliging. They were willing to discuss the theory of child-rearing with him as long as he would listen, but their advice merely caused him to glare balefully and to curse them. Nor did he regard it as a mark of friendship on their part when they collected an audience that evening to watch him milk the cow—a procedure, by the way, not devoid of excitement and hazard, inasmuch as Branch's knowledge of cows was even more theoretical than his knowledge of babies.

Leslie had begun by this time to realize that there existed a general conspiracy against him; he met it with sullen resentment. He deeply regretted his ignorance of the

Spanish language, however, for a thousand epithets and insults clamored for translation.

Now there are cows which an amateur can milk, and there are other kinds. This particular cow was shy, apprehensive, peevish; Branch's unpractised fumbling irritated her. Being herself a nomad of the savannas, she was accustomed to firm, masterful men, therefore when Leslie attempted courteously, apologetically, to separate her from her milk she turned and hooked him.

El Demonio's audience, who had been looking on with rapt attention, applauded this show of spirit. Branch was unwontedly meek. He acknowledged his total inexperience, and begged his friends, almost politely, to call for a substitute.

Judson explained, gravely, "These Cubans don't know any more about cows than you do."

O'Reilly agreed, "They're good bull-fighters, but they can't milk."

Leslie eyed the speakers, white with rage; he was trembling. "You think you're damned funny, don't you? You're having a jubilee with me. Well, I'm game. I'll go through with it. If you'll hold her, I'll milk her. I'll milk her till she hollers."

Obligingly, O'Reilly took the animal by the horns and Judson laid hold of her tail.

"Stretch her tight," Leslie commanded. "Don't give her an inch of slack, or I'll quit." When his friends had braced themselves he moved toward the cow once more, but this time from the opposite quarter. Noting the direction of his approach, the onlookers gave vent to a low murmur of expectancy. They drew closer.

Strangely enough, the animal stood quiet for a time—lost in amazement, perhaps—and Leslie managed to cover the bottom of his big tin cup with milk. But at last the outrage proved too much for her; she slowly lifted one hind foot and poised it jerkily. She seemed to consider

the next move for a moment; then she kicked forward and sent Branch flying.

"Can you beat that?" O'Reilly exclaimed in apparent wonderment. "Why, she walloped you with the back of her hand."

Judson, too, affected great amazement. "Most cows are left-handed," he declared. "Try her on the other side."

Branch dried the milk from his face, then in a shaking voice cried: "Have a good time with me. It's your last chance."

It seemed for a while that the enterprise was doomed to failure; but at last a pint or more of milk was secured, and this Leslie proceeded to dilute with warm water from a near-by camp-fire. Even then, however, his difficulties were not over. He had supposed that any baby knew enough to drink. It took him half an hour to discover his mistake. Having long since given up the hope of any active assistance from his audience, he doggedly set to work to fashion a nursing-bottle. He succeeded in due time, after making use of a flask, the stem of an unused cigarette-holder, and a handkerchief.

When he finally took seat and began awkwardly coaxing the fretful child to drink, the Cubans voiced their appreciation of the picture. They were courteous, they did not laugh; nevertheless, the sight of their eccentric, irascible, rebellious El Demonio tamely nursing a child in the firelight filled them with luxurious, soul-satisfying enjoyment.

O'Reilly was up at daylight to offer his services in caring for Estéban Varona, but Norine declined them.

"His fever is down a little and he has taken some nourishment," she reported. "That food you boys risked your silly lives for may come in handy, after all."

"I dare say he won't be able to talk to me to-day?" O'Reilly ventured.

"Not to-day, nor for many days, I'm afraid."

"If you don't mind, then, I'll hang around and listen to what he says," he told her, wistfully. "He might drop a word about Rosa."

"To be sure. So far he's scarcely mentioned her. I can't understand much that he says, of course, but Mrs. Ruiz tells me it's all jumbled and quite unintelligible. How is Leslie's baby this morning?"

"Oh, it passed a good night. It was awake and had ordered breakfast when I got up. Leslie was making a fire to scald out its bottle. He says he didn't close his eyes all night."

"Poor fellow! I'm going to help him," Norine declared.

"Please don't. Lopez wants to teach him a lesson, and this is the best thing that could possibly have happened. We have told him that there's no chance of returning the baby, and he thinks he's elected to keep it indefinitely. As a matter of fact, Jacket is going to take a letter to the comandante at San Antonio this morning, advising him that the child is safe, and asking him to send for it at once."

"Isn't that risky?" Norine inquired. "Won't the comandante attack us if he learns where we are?"

"Lopez doesn't think so. Those Spaniards are usually pretty scrupulous on points of honor. There was some difficulty in getting a messenger, but Jacket volunteered. He volunteers for anything, that boy. They wouldn't be likely to hurt a kid like him. If they should, why, we have the baby, you see."

Although Norine had pretended to wash her hands of all responsibility for Branch's little charge, she was by no means so inhuman as she appeared. During the day she kept a jealous eye upon it, and especially upon its diet.

Fortunately for all concerned, it was a good-natured child; so long as its stomach was full it was contented. It slept a good deal, and what time it was awake it sucked

its fist and suffered itself to be variously entertained by the men. There were, of course, a number of fellows who could see no humor at all in El Demonio's plight, nor any reason for adding to his embarrassments. These came to his aid in numerous ways.

It was an idle day; there was nothing to do except play with the baby; before night came the child had established itself as a general favorite. Even Branch himself had become interested in it.

"Say, I've learned a lot about kids from this one," he confided to O'Reilly at dinner-time. "I always thought young babies were just damp, sour-smelling little animals, but this one has character. She knows me already, and I'm getting so I can pick her up without feeling that I'm going to puncture her. She's full of dimples, too. Got 'em everywhere. What do you think we'd better name her?"

"She probably has a name. Do you expect to keep her permanently?"

Branch considered. "I wouldn't have thought of such a thing yesterday, but how are we going to get rid of her? That's the question. We can't just leave her with the first family we come to. These country people have more kids than they know what to do with."

"Thinking about taking her on the march with us?" O'Reilly looked up, much amused.

"I don't see why it couldn't be done. The men wouldn't mind and she'd make a dandy mascot."

O'Reilly shook his head. "This isn't a baseball team. What about the baby's mother?"

"Bullets! Fine mother *she* was, to desert her child. I'll bet she's glad to get rid of it. People like that don't have any more affection than—cattle. They don't deserve to have children. What's more, they don't know how to care for them. I'd like to raise this kid according to my own ideas." Branch's face lightened suddenly. "Say! I've just thought of a name for her!"

"What?"

"Bullets!"

"Are you swearing or naming her?"

"Wouldn't that be a good name? It's new, and it means something. Raid, battle, rain of bullets! See? Bullets Branch—that doesn't sound bad."

With deliberate malice O'Reilly said, gravely: "Of course, if you adopt her, you can name her what you choose—but she's a mighty brown baby! I have my suspicions that—she's a mulatto."

Branch was shocked, indignant. "That child's as white as you are," he sputtered. Then noting the twinkle in O'Reilly's eyes he turned away, muttering angrily.

Strangely enough, Leslie's fantastic suggestion found echo in more than one quarter, and many of his camp-mates began to argue that El Demonio's baby would certainly bring the troop good luck, if it could keep her. Adoption of some sort was gravely discussed that evening around more than one camp-fire.

After breakfast on the following morning the baby was bathed. This was an event, and it had been advertised as such. An interested and admiring group of swarthy cigarette-smokers looked on while Branch officiated, Norine's offer to perform the service less publicly having been refused. Leslie was just drying off the chubby form when he was unexpectedly interrupted.

Jacket had made his round trip in safety, but instead of bringing a squad of the enemy's soldiers with him he had brought the child's parents, which was a much more sensible thing to do.

The storekeeper and his wife arrived unheralded; they gave no warning of their coming, and they exchanged no amenities with the ravagers of their home. Hearing the shrill, petulant voice of their beloved, they made directly for it, as eagles swoop from the sky at threat to their nest.

Branch looked up at the sound of some swift approach.

He beheld an entirely strange woman bearing down upon him. Her face was white, frantic, terrible; her arms were outstretched; she gave utterance to a peculiar, distressing cry. Snatching the baby from his lap without so much as "by your leave," she clutched it to a billowing brown bosom.

Leslie rose, protesting, just in time to receive the full onslaught of the child's distracted father. He went down in a swirl of arms and legs; he felt himself kicked, pounded, trampled, beaten, scratched, until his friends came to the rescue and dragged him to his feet. He rose to behold a small, fat, disheveled Spaniard who had turned from assaulting him and now appeared to be engaged in biting mouthfuls from such portions of the baby's anatomy as were not hidden in its mother's embrace.

A clamor of voices breaking the Sabbath calm of the morning brought Norine Evans running from her tent. One look, and its cause was plain. Fifty men were talking loudly; fifty pairs of arms were waving. In consequence of the torrent of words that beat upon their ears it was some time before the merchant and his wife could be made to fully understand the peculiar circumstances of the kidnapping, and that no harm had been intended to their darling. Slowly, bit by bit, they learned the truth, but even then the mother could not look upon Leslie Branch without a menacing dilation of the eyes and a peculiar expression of restrained ferocity.

The father was more reasonable, however; once he was assured of his daughter's safety, his thankfulness sought outlet. He began by embracing every one within his reach. He kissed Norine, he kissed O'Reilly, he kissed Judson, he made a rush at Leslie himself; but the latter, suspicious of his intent, fled. Unmindful of the fact that these were the men who had relieved him of a considerable stock of goods and profaned his holy of holies, he recklessly

distributed among them what money he had upon his person and then gave away the remaining contents of his pockets. He swore his undying love for them all. Smiting his breast excitedly, he urged them as a personal favor and a mark of his overflowing gratitude to return to San Antonio de los Baños, make themselves masters of all his worldly possessions, and then burn his store.

While this was going on, Jacket was proudly advertising his share of the enterprise, not failing to give himself full credit.

"By ——! I made a big hit with that comandante," he told his American friends. "Those people in San Antonio say I'm the bravest boy they ever seen, and they give me more'n a thousand cigars. When I rode away I saluted the comandante; then I yelled, 'Vive Cuba Libre!' and everybody laughed like hell. I guess those people never seen nobody like me before."

That afternoon, when it came time for the merchant and his little family to set out for home, a crowd of regretful Insurrectos assembled to bid them farewell and to look for the last time upon the baby. By now the mother's apprehensions had given way to pride and she could bring herself to smile at the compliments showered upon her offspring and to answer in kind those which were aimed at herself. She even permitted El Demonio to kiss the child good-by. Her husband, since his arrival in camp, had heard much about the eccentric American, and now, after apologizing abjectly for his unwarranted attack, he invited Branch to visit his store when this hideous war was over and Cuba was free. Finally, in spite of Leslie's frantic struggles, he embraced him and planted a moist kiss upon either cheek.

Amid loud and repeated good wishes and a cheer for the baby the visitors rode away.

Lopez linked his arm within O'Reilly's as they turned back into the palm-grove. With a smile he said:

"Well, I hope this has taught your friend to steal no more babies."

"I'm afraid he'll steal the very next one he sees. He fell in love with that one and wanted to keep it."

"Oh, he wasn't alone in that. It's queer how sentimental soldiers become. I've often noticed it. When I was in the Rubi Hills some of my fellows adopted a goat. We had to eat it finally, but those men wouldn't touch a piece of the flesh—and they were starving. By the way, how is Varona doing?"

"About the same."

Lopez frowned. "I shall have to send him to Cubitas to-morrow, for we must be under way."

"If he has to be moved, let me do it. I'd like to be with him when he comes out of his fever, and learn what he knows about his sister." O'Reilly's appeal was earnest.

The colonel readily yielded. "Go, by all means. Report to General Gomez, and he no doubt will let you stay until the boy can talk. He may have news from Matanzas by that time."

O'Reilly pressed his colonel's hand gratefully. "You're mighty good," said he. "There's one thing more. Will you look out for Branch while I'm gone, and—hold him down?"

Lopez laughed lightly. "Oh, he'll soon get over his recklessness. This life agrees with him. Why, he's a different man already! When he gets well and has something to live for he will want to live. You'll see."

XXI

TREASURE

IT was a balmy, languid morning about two weeks after O'Reilly's return to the City among the Leaves. The Cubitas Mountains were green and sparkling from a recent shower; wood fires smoldered in front of the bark huts, sending up their wavering streamers of blue; a pack-train from the lower country was unloading fresh vegetables in the main street, and a group of ragged men were disputing over them. Some children were playing baseball near by.

In a hammock swung between two trees Estéban Varona lay, listening to the admonitions of his nurse.

Johnnie O'Reilly had just bade them both a hearty good morning and now Norine was saying: "One hour, no more. You had a temperature again last night, and it came from talking too much."

"Oh, I'm better this morning," Estéban declared. "I'm getting so that I want to talk. I was too tired at first, but now—"

"*Now*, you will do exactly as you are told. Remember, it takes me just one hour to make my rounds, and if you are not through with your tales of blood and battle when I get back you'll have to finish them to-morrow." With a nod and a smile she left.

As Estéban looked after her his white teeth gleamed and his hollow face lit up.

"She brings me new life," he told O'Reilly. "She is so strong, so healthy, so full of life herself. She is wonderful! When I first saw her bending over me I thought I was

dreaming. Sometimes, even yet, I think she cannot be real. But she is, eh?"

"She is quite substantial," O'Reilly smiled.

"I can tell when she is anywhere near, for my illness leaves me. It's a fact! And her hands— Well, she lays them on my head, and it no longer hurts; the fever disappears. There is some cool, delicious magic in her touch; it makes a fellow want to live. You have perhaps noticed it?"

"N-no! You see, she never lays her hands on my head. However, I dare say you're right. All the sick fellows talk as you do."

Estéban looked up quickly; his face darkened. "She—er—nurses *others*, eh? I'm not the only one?"

"Well, hardly."

There was a brief pause; then Estéban shifted his position and his tone changed. "Tell me, have you heard any news?"

"Not yet, but we will hear some before long I'm sure."

"Your faith does as much for me as this lady's care. But when you go away, when I'm alone, when I begin to think—"

"Don't think too much; don't permit yourself to doubt," O'Reilly said, quickly. "Take my word for it, Rosa is alive and we'll find her somewhere, somehow. You heard that she had fallen into Cobo's hands when he sacked the Yumuri, but now we know that she and the negroes were living in the Pan de Matanzas long after that. In the same way Lopez assured me positively that you were dead. Well, look at you! It shows how little faith we can put in any story. No, Rosa is safe, and General Gomez will soon have word of her. That's what I've been waiting for—that and what you might have to tell me."

"You know all that I know now and everything that has happened to me."

"I don't know how you came to be in a cell in San Antonio de los Baños, two hundred miles from the place you were killed. That is still a mystery."

"It is very simple, amigo. Let me see: I had finished telling you about the fight at La Joya. I was telling you how I fainted."

"Exactly. Norine bound and gagged you at that point in the story."

"Some good people found me a few hours after I lost consciousness. They supposed I had been attacked by guerrillas and left for dead. Finding that I still had life in me, they took me home with them. They were old friends from Matanzas by the name of Valdes—cultured people who had fled the city and were hiding in the manigua like the rest of us."

"Not Valdes, the notary?"

"The very same. Alberto Valdes and his four daughters. Heaven guided them to me. Alberto was an old man; he had hard work to provide food for his girls. Nevertheless, he refused to abandon me. The girls had become brown and ragged and as shy as deer. They nursed me for weeks, for my wounds became infected. God! It seems to me that I lay there sick and helpless for years. When my brain would clear I would think of Rosa, and then the fever would rise again and I would go out of my head. Oh, they were faithful, patient people! You see, I had walked east instead of west, and now I was miles away from home, and the country between was swarming with Spaniards who were burning, destroying, killing. You wouldn't know Matanzas, O'Reilly. It is a desert.

"I finally became able to drag myself around the hut. But I had no means of sending word to Rosa, and the uncertainty nearly made me crazy. My clothes had rotted from me; my bones were just under the skin. I must have been a shocking sight. Then one day there

came a fellow traveling east with messages for Gomez. He was one of Lopez's men, and he told me that Lopez had gone to the Rubi Hills with Maceo, and that there were none of our men left in the province. He told me other things, too. It was from him that I learned—Estéban Varona's thin hands clutched the edges of his hammock and he rolled his head weakly from side to side. "It was he who told me about Rosa. He said that Cobo had ravaged the Yumuri and that my sister—was gone. Christ!"

"There, there! We know better now," O'Reilly said, soothingly.

"It was a hideous story, a story of rape, murder. I wonder that I didn't go mad. It never occurred to me to doubt, and as a matter of fact the fellow was honest enough; he really believed what he told me. Well, I was sorry I hadn't died that night in the sunken road. All the hope, all the desire to live, went out of me. You see, I had been more than half expecting something of the kind. Every time I had left Rosa it had been with the sickening fear that I might never see here again. After the man had finished I felt the desire to get away from all I had known and loved, to leave Matanzas for new fields and give what was left of me to the cause.

"I presume Alberto and the girls were relieved to get rid of me, for it meant more food for them. Anyhow, between us we prevailed upon the messenger to take me along. I was free to enlist, since I couldn't reach Lopez, and I came to join our forces in the Orient.

"That is how you found me in this province. Lopez's man never delivered those despatches, for we were taken crossing the trocha—at least *I* was taken, for Pablo was killed. They'd have made an end of me, too, I dare say, only I was so weak. It seems a century since that night. My memory doesn't serve me very well from that point, for they jailed me, and I grew worse. I was out of my

head a good deal. I seem to remember a stockade somewhere and other prisoners, some of whom nursed me. You say you found me in a cell in San Antonio de los Baños. Well, I don't know how I got there, and I never heard of the place."

"It will probably all come back to you in time," said O'Reilly.

"No doubt."

The two men fell silent for a while. Estéban lay with closed eyes, exhausted. O'Reilly gave himself up to frowning thought. His thoughts were not pleasant; he could not, for the life of him, believe in Rosa's safety so implicitly as he had led Estéban to suppose; his efforts to cheer the other had sapped his own supply of hope, leaving him a prey to black misgivings. He was glad when Norine Evans's return put an end to his speculations.

Estéban was right; the girl did have an unusual ability to banish shadows, a splendid power to rout devils both of the spirit and of the flesh; she was a sort of antibody, destroying every noxious or unhealthy thing mental or physical with which she came in contact. This blessed capability was quite distinct from her skill with medicines —it was a gift, and as much a part of her as the healing magic which dwells in the sunshine.

Certainly her knack of lending health and strength from her own abundant store had never been better shown than in Estéban's case, for with almost no medical assistance she had brought him back from the very voids. It was quite natural, therefore, that she should take a pride in her work and regard him with a certain jealous proprietary interest; it was equally natural that he should claim the greater share of her attention.

"Have you harrowed this poor man's feelings sufficiently for once?" she inquired of O'Reilly.

"I have. I'll agree to talk about nothing unpleasant hereafter."

Estéban turned to his nurse, inquiring, abruptly, "Do you think Rosa is alive?"

"Why, of course I do! Aren't you alive and—almost well?"

Now, as an argument, there was no particular force in this suggestion; nevertheless, both men felt reassured. Estéban heaved a grateful sigh. After a moment he said,

"There is something I want to tell you both."

"Wait until to-morrow," Norine advised.

But he persisted: "No! I must tell it now. First, however, did either of you discover an old coin in any of my pockets—an old Spanish doubloon?"

"That doubloon again!" Norine lifted her hands protestingly, and cast a meaning look at O'Reilly. "You talked about nothing else for a whole week. Let me feel your pulse."

Estéban surrendered his hand with suspicious readiness.

"You were flat broke when we got you," O'Reilly declared.

"Probably. I seem to remember that somebody stole it."

"Doubloons! Pieces of eight! Golden guineas!" exclaimed Norine. "Why those are pirate coins! They remind me of Treasure Island; of Long John Silver and his wooden leg; of Ben Gunn and all the rest." With a voice made hoarse, doubtless to imitate the old nut-brown seaman with the saber-scar and the tarry pig-tail, who sat sipping his rum and water in the Admiral Benbow Inn, she began to chant:

"Fifteen men on the dead man's chest—
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!
Drink and the Devil had done for the rest—
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!"

Estéban smiled uncomprehendingly. "Yes? Well,

this has to do with treasure. That doubloon was a part of the lost treasure of the Varonas."

"Lost treasure!" Norine's gray eyes widened. "What are you talking about?"

"There is a mysterious fortune in our family. My father buried it. He was very rich, you know, and he was afraid of the Spaniards. O'Reilly knows the story."

Johnnie assented with a grunt. "Sure! I know all about it."

Estéban raised himself to his elbow. "You think it's a myth, a joke. Well, it's not. I know where it is. I found it!"

Norine gasped; Johnnie spoke soothingly:

"Don't get excited, old man; you've talked too much to-day."

"Ha!" Estéban fell back upon his pillow. "I haven't any fever. I'm as sane as ever I was. That treasure exists, and that doubloon gave me the clue to its whereabouts. Pancho Cueto knew my father, and *he* believed the story. He believed in it so strongly that—well—that's why he denounced my sister and me as traitors. He dug up our entire premises, but he didn't find it." Estéban chuckled. "Don Estéban, my father, was cunning: he could hide things better than a magpie. It remained for me to discover his trick."

Norine Evans spoke breathlessly. "Oh, glory! Treasure! *Real* treasure! How perfectly exciting! Tell me how you found it, quick! Johnnie, you remember he raved about a doubloon—"

"He is raving now," O'Reilly declared, with a sharp stare at his friend.

The girl turned loyally to her patient. "I'll believe you, Mr. Varona. I always believe everything about buried treasure. The bigger the treasure the more implicitly I believe in it. I simply adore pirates and such things; if I were a man I'd be one. Do you know, I've

always been tempted to bury my money and then go look for it."

"You're making fun of me. What?" Estéban eyed the pair doubtfully.

"No, no!" Norine was indignant. "Johnnie doesn't believe in pirates or treasure, or—anything. He doesn't even believe in fairies, and he's Irish, too. But I do. I revel in such things. If you don't go on, I'll blow up."

"There is no doubt that my father had a great deal of money at one time," Estéban began; "he was the richest man in the richest city of Cuba and . . ."

O'Reilly shook his head dubiously and braced his back against a tree-trunk; there was a look of mild disapprobation on his face as he listened to the familiar story of Don Estéban and the slave, Sebastian.

Young Estéban told the tale well. His own faith in it lent a certain convincingness to his words and Norine Evans hung upon them entranced. She was horrified at the account of Don Estéban's death; her eyes grew dark as Estéban told of his and Rosa's childhood with their avaricious stepmother. That part of the narrative which had to do with the death of Doña Isabel and the finding of the gold coin was new to O'Reilly and he found himself considerably impressed by it. When Estéban had finished, Norine drew a deep breath.

"Oh! That lays over any story I ever heard. To think that the deeds and the jewels and everything are in the well *at this minute!* How *could* you go away and leave them?"

"I didn't think it out at the time. I didn't evolve my theory until after I had fled. Naturally, I wasn't able to get back."

"But suppose somebody finds it?" Norine was aghast at the thought.

"Not much chance of that. The treasure has lain there for a generation, and the story itself is almost

forgotten." Estéban turned triumphantly to O'Reilly, saying, "Now then, do you think I'm so crazy?"

O'Reilly didn't have it in his heart to say exactly what he really thought. The circumstances of the discovery of the coin were odd enough, certainly, but it seemed to him that they were capable of several explanations. If, indeed, there had ever been a doubloon and if Estéban had found it in the dead hand of his stepmother, that, in O'Reilly's opinion, by no means proved the existence of the mythical Varona hoard, nor did it solve the secret of its whereabouts. What he more than half suspected was that some favored fancy had formed lodgment in Estéban's brain.

"It's an interesting theory," he admitted. "Anyhow, there is no danger of the treasure being uncovered very soon. Cueto had a good look and made himself ridiculous. You'll have ample chance to do likewise when the war is over."

"You must help me find it," said Estéban. "We shall all share the fortune equally, you two, Rosa and I."

"*We?* Why should *we* share in it?" Norine asked.

"I owe it to you. Didn't O'Reilly rescue me from a dungeon? Haven't you nursed me back to health? Don't I owe my life to you both?"

"Nonsense! I, for one, sha'n't take a dollar of it," the girl declared. "All I want to do is help dig. If you'll just promise to let me do that—"

"I promise. And you shall have one-fourth of everything."

"No! No!"

"Oh, but you *must*. I insist. Nursing is a poorly paid profession. Wouldn't you like to be rich?"

"Profession! Poorly paid?" Norine sputtered, angrily. "As if I'd take pay!"

"As if I would accept a great service and forget it, like some miserable beggar!" Estéban replied, stiffly.

O'Reilly laughed out. "Don't let's quarrel over the

spoil until we get it," said he. "That's the way with all treasure-hunters. They invariably fall out and go to fighting. To avoid bloodshed, I'll agree to sell my interest cheap, for cash. Come! What will you bid? Start it low. Do I hear a dollar bid? A dollar! A dollar! A dollar! My share of the famous Varona fortune going for a dollar!"

"There! He doesn't believe a word of it," Estéban said.

Norine gave an impatient shrug. "Some people wouldn't believe they were alive unless they saw their breath on a looking-glass. Goodness! How I hate a sneering skeptic, a wet blanket."

O'Reilly rose with one arm shielding his face. "In the interest of friendship, I withdraw. A curse on these buried treasures, anyhow. We shall yet come to blows."

As he walked away he heard Norine say: "Don't pay any attention to him. We'll go and dig it up ourselves, and we won't wait until the war is over."

An hour later Estéban and his nurse still had their heads together. They were still talking of golden ingots and pearls from the Caribbean the size of plums when they looked up to see O'Reilly running toward them. He was visibly excited; he waved and shouted at them. He was panting when he arrived.

"News! From Matanzas!" he cried. "Gomez's man has arrived."

Estéban struggled to rise, but Norine restrained him. "Rosa? What does he say? Quick!"

"Good news! She left the Pan de Matanzas with the two negroes. She went into the city before Cobo's raid."

Estéban collapsed limply. He closed his eyes, his face was very white. He crossed himself weakly.

"The letter is definite. It seems they were starving. They obeyed Weyler's bando. They're in Matanzas now."

"Do you hear, Estéban?" Norine shook her patient by the shoulder. "She's alive. Oh, can't you see that it always pays to believe the best?"

"Alive! Safe!" Estéban whispered. His eyes, when he opened them, were swimming; he clutched Norine's hand tightly; his other hand he extended to O'Reilly. The latter was choking; his cheeks, too, were wet. "A reconcentrado! In Matanzas! Well, that's good. We have friends there—they'll not let her starve. This makes a new man of me. See! I'm strong again. I'll go to her."

"*You'll* go?" quickly cried Miss Evans. "*You'll* go! You're not strong enough. It would be suicide. You, with a price upon your head! Everybody knows you there. Matanzas is virtually a walled city. There's sickness, too—yellow fever, typhus—"

"Exactly. And hunger, also. Suppose no one has taken Rosa in? Those concentration camps aren't nice places for a girl."

"But wait! I have friends in Washington. They're influential. They will cable the American consul to look after her. Anyhow, you mustn't think of returning to Matanzas," Norine faltered; her voice caught unexpectedly and she turned her face away.

O'Reilly nodded shortly. "You're a sick man," he agreed. "There's no need for both of us to go."

Estéban looked up. "Then you—"

"I leave at once. The Old Man has given me a commission to General Betancourt, and I'll be on my way in an hour. The moon is young; I must cross the trocha before—"

"That trocha!" Estéban was up on his elbow again. "Be careful there, O'Reilly. They keep a sharp lookout, and it's guarded with barbed wire. Be sure you cut every strand. Yes, and muffle your horse's hoofs, too, in crossing the railroad track. That's how we were de-

tected. Pablo's horse struck a rail, and they fired at the sound. He fell at the first volley, riddled. Oh, I know that trocha!"

"Damn the trocha!" O'Reilly exclaimed. "At last I've got a chance to *do* something. *God!* How long I've waited."

Estéban drew O'Reilly's tense form down and embraced his friend, after the fashion of his people. "She has been waiting, too," he said, huskily. "We Varonas are good waiters, O'Reilly. Rosa will never cease waiting until you come. Tell her, for me—"

Norine withdrew softly out of earshot. There were a lump in her throat and a pain in her breast. She had acquired a peculiar and affectionate interest in this unhappy girl whom she had never seen, and she had learned to respect O'Reilly's love. The yearning that had pulsed in his voice a moment before had stirred her deeply; it awoke a throb in her own bosom, for O'Reilly was dear to her. She wanted him to go, yet she knew the hazards that lay in his way. If, indeed, the girl were in Matanzas, how, Norine asked herself, was it possible for him to reach her? That O'Reilly had some mad design was evident; that he would utterly disregard his own safety she felt sure. But that he would meet with failure, perhaps worse, seemed equally certain. Matanzas was a beleagured city, and strangers could not enter or leave it at will. If Rosa had not put herself behind prison walls, if she were still in hiding somewhere on the island, it would be a simple matter to seek her out. But Matanzas, of all places!

Then, too, the *pacificos*, according to all reports, were dying like flies in the prison camps. Norine wondered if there might not be a terrible heartache at the end of O'Reilly's quest? Her face was grave and worried when, hearing him speak to her, she turned to take his outstretched hand.

"You will be careful, won't you?" she implored. "And you'll be stout of heart, no matter what occurs?"

He nodded. "It's a long way back here to Cubitas. You may not see or hear from me again."

"I understand." She choked miserably. "You mean you may not come back. Oh, Johnnie!"

"Tut, tut! We O'Reillys have more lives than a litter of cats. I mean I may not see you until the war is over and we meet in New York. Well, we've been good pals, and—I'm glad you came to Cuba." His grasp upon her two hands was painful.

"You must go, I know, and I wouldn't try to keep you, but—" Norine faltered, then impulsively she drew him down and kissed him full upon the lips. "For Rosa!" she whispered. Her eyes were shining as she watched him pass swiftly out of sight.

XXII

THE TROCHA

OF all the military measures employed by the Spaniards in their wars against Cuban independence, perhaps the most unique was the *trocha*—trench or traverse. Martinez Campos during the Ten Years' War built the first *trocha* just west of the Cubitas Mountains where the waist of the island is narrowest. It was Campos's hope, by means of this artificial barrier, to confine the operations of the insurgents to the eastern end of Cuba, but in that he failed, as likewise he failed in the results gained by his efforts to concentrate the rural population in the cities. Not until Weyler's time were these two methods of pacification, the *trocha* and the concentration camp, developed to their fullest extent. Under the rule of the Butcher several *trochas* were constructed at selected points, and he carried to its logical conclusion the policy of concentration, with results sufficiently frightful to shock the world and to satisfy even Weyler's monstrous appetite for cruelty. Although his *trochas* hindered the free movement of Cuban troops and his prison camps decimated the peaceful population of several provinces, the Spanish cause gained little. Both trenches and prison camps became Spanish graveyards.

Weyler's intrenchments cost millions and were elaborately constructed, belted with barbed wire, bristling with blockhouses and forts. In both the digging and the manning, however, they cost uncounted lives. Spanish spades turned up fevers with the soil, and, so long as raw Spanish troops were compelled to toil in the steaming

morasses or to lie inactive under the sun and the rain, those traitor generals—June, July, and August—continued to pile up the bodies in rotting heaps and to timber the trenches with their bones. So long as the cities were overcrowded with *pacificos* and their streets were putrid with disease, so long did the Spanish garrisons sicken and die, as flies perish upon poisoned carrion.

Out on the cool, clean hills and the windy savannas where the Insurrectos dwelt there was health. Poorly armed, ragged, gaunt, these Insurrectos were kept moving by hunger, always moving like cattle on a barren range. But they were healthy, for disease, which is soft-footed and tender-bellied, could not keep up.

At the time Johnnie O'Reilly set out for Matanzas the war—a war without battle, without victory, without defeat—had settled into a grim contest of endurance. In the east, where the Insurrectos were practically supreme, there was food of a sort, but beyond the Jucaro-Moron *trocha*—the old one of Campos's building—the country was sick. Immediately west of it, in that district which the Cubans called Las Villas, the land lay dying, while the entire provinces of Matanzas, Habana, and Pinar del Rio were practically dead. These three were skeletons, picked bare of flesh by Weyler's beak.

The Jucaro-Moron *trocha* had been greatly strengthened since Campos's day. It followed the line of the transinsular railway. Dotted at every quarter of a mile along the grade were little forts connected by telephone and telegraph lines. Between these *fortinas* were sentry stations of logs or railroad ties. The jungle on either side of the right-of-way had been cleared, and from the remaining stumps and posts and fallen tree-trunks hung a maze of barbed wire through which a man could scarcely crawl, even in daylight. Eyes were keen, rifles were ready, challenges were sharp, and countersigns were quickly given on the Jucaro-Moron *trocha*.

In O'Reilly's party there were three men besides himself —the ever-faithful Jacket, a wrinkled old Camagueyan who knew the bridle trails of his province as a fox knows the tracks to its lair, and a silent *guajiro* from farther west, detailed to accompany the expedition because of his wide acquaintance with the devastated districts. Both guides, having crossed the *trocha* more than once, affected to scorn its terrors, and their easy confidence reassured O'Reilly in spite of Estéban's parting admonition.

The American had not dreamed of taking Jacket along, but when he came to announce his departure the boy had flatly refused to be left behind. Jacket, in fact, had taken the matter entirely into his own hands and had appealed directly to General Gomez. To his general the boy had explained tearfully that patriotism was a rare and an admirable quality, but that his love of country was not half so strong or so sacred as his affection for Johnnie O'Reilly. Having attached himself to the American for better or for worse, no human power could serve to detach him, so he asserted. He threatened, moreover, that if he were compelled to suffer his benefactor to go alone into the west he would lay down his arms and permit General Gomez to free Cuba as best he could. Cuba could go to Hades, so far as Jacket was concerned—he would not lift a finger to save it. Strangely enough, Jacket's threat of defection had not appalled General Gomez. In fact, with a dyspeptic gruffness characteristic of him Gomez had ordered the boy off, under penalty of a sound spanking. But Jacket had a will of his own, likewise a temper. He greeted this unfeeling refusal with a noisy outburst of mingled rage, grief, and defiance. Stamping his bare feet, sobbing, and screaming, the boy finally flung himself upon the ground and smote it with his fists, while tears streamed from his eyes. Nor could he be silenced. He maintained such a hideous and surprising uproar, answering Gomez's stern

commands to be silent with such maniacal howls, that the old soldier was finally glad to yield his consent, incidentally consigning the rebellious youth to that perdition with which he had threatened Cuba.

Having won his point, Jacket regained his composure with suspicious suddenness and raced away to triumph over his beloved O'Reilly.

Fifty miles of hard riding brought the party to the *trocha;* they neared it on the second morning after leaving Cubitas, and sought a secluded camping-spot. Later in the day Hilario, the old Camagueyan, slipped away to reconnoiter. He returned at twilight, but volunteered no report of what he had discovered. After an insistent cross-examination O'Reilly wrung from him the reluctant admission that everything seemed favorable for a crossing some time that night, and that he had selected a promising point. Beyond that the old man would say nothing. Johnnie asked himself uneasily if this reticence was not really due to apprehension rather than to sullenness. Whatever the cause, it was not particularly reassuring, and as evening came on Johnnie found himself growing decidedly nervous.

Supper, a simple meal, was quickly disposed of. Then followed a long, dispiriting wait, for a gibbous moon rode high in the sky and the guides refused to stir so long as it remained there. It was a still night; in the jungle no air was stirring, and darkness brought forth a torment of mosquitoes. As day died, the woods awoke to sounds of bird and insect life; strange, raucous calls pealed forth, some familiar, others strange and unaccustomed. There were thin whistlings, hoarse grunts and harsh cacklings, high-pitched elfin laughter. Moving bodies disturbed the leaves overhead; from all sides came the rustle and stir of unseen creatures; sudden disputations were followed by startled silences. Sitting there in the dark, bedeviled by a pest of insects, mocked at by these mysterious voices,

and looking forward to a hazardous enterprise, O'Reilly began to curse his vivid imagination and to envy the impassiveness of his companions. Even Jacket, he noted, endured the strain better; the boy was cheerful, philosophical, quite unimpressed by his surroundings. When the mosquitoes became unbearable he put on his trousers, with some reluctance and much ceremony.

It seemed to O'Reilly that the moon floated motionless in the sky, and more than once he was upon the point of ordering a start, but he reflected that its radiance out in the open must be far greater than it seemed here under the dense tropical foliage. After a time he began to wonder if his guides were as loyal as they should be, if Hilario's strange reticence was caused by sullenness, by apprehension, or by something altogether different. Both of the men were strangers to him; of their fidelity he had no guarantee. Now that his mind had become engaged with thoughts of treachery, a determined effort was necessary to keep himself in hand and O'Reilly fell back finally upon his elemental trust in the Cuban character—scant consolation under the circumstances.

Midnight brought a moist, warm breeze and a few formless clouds which served at times to dimly obscure the moon. Watching the clouds, O'Reilly hoped that they might prove to be the heralds of a storm. None came. When the moon had finally crept down into the treetops old Hilario stepped upon his cigarette, then began silently to saddle up. The others followed with alacrity, and fell in behind him as he led the way into the forest. They no longer ventured to speak aloud; nothing but the occasional sound of a hoof striking upon root or stone, the creak of leather, or the rustle of branches against passing bodies gave evidence that mounted men were en route.

When they had covered a couple of miles Hilario reined in and the others crowded close. Ahead, dimly discernible against the night sky, there appeared to be a thinning of

the woods. After listening for a moment or two, Hilario dismounted and slipped away; the three riders sat their saddles with ears strained. Once more the myriad voices of the night became audible—the chirping of crickets, the strident call of tree-toads, the whining undertone of the mosquitoes.

Hilario returned with word that all was well, and each man dismounted to muffle the feet of his horse with rags and strips of gunny-sack provided for the purpose. Then, one by one, they moved forward to the edge of the clearing. The *trocha* lay before them.

After the cavernous obscurity of the jungle the night seemed suddenly to lighten and O'Reilly found himself looking out over a level waste of stumps and tree-trunks perhaps a quarter of a mile wide, extending right and left as far as he could see. Against the luminous western horizon opposite the inky forest stood like a wall. Midway of the clearing there was a railroad grade with a telephone-pole or two limned against the sky. The clearing was silent and to all appearances deserted; nothing stirred, no sign of life appeared anywhere. And yet, as the American studied the place, he had a queer, uncomfortable sensation that it was thickly peopled and that eyes were peering out at him from the gloom. Blurred forms took shape, phantom figures moved along the embankment, stumps stirred.

O'Reilly felt a pair of reins thrust into his hand and found Hilario examining a large pair of tinner's shears.

"Do you wish me to go with you?" he inquired of the guide.

The latter shook his head. "Antonio will go; he will keep watch while I clear a path. If you hear or see anything—"

Jacket interrupted with a sibilant: "Psst! Look! Yonder!"

A lantern-like illumination had leaped out of the

blackness and now approached swiftly down the railroad grade.

O'Reilly laid a heavy hand upon the old Camagueyan and inquired in sharp suspicion, "What does that mean—an alarm?"

There was a breathless moment during which the four men followed the erratic course of the spark. Then Antonio chuckled. "Alabaos! A light-bug," said he. "Don't you know a cucullo when you see one?" He cautiously tested the ejector of his carbine and tightened the cord that served as his belt.

O'Reilly drew a deep breath of relief. He had never become wholly accustomed to the giant light-beetles of the tropics, although he had carried one often on sentry duty to see the face of his watch, and not infrequently had seen Cuban women wearing them in their hair as ornaments.

"Jove!" he muttered. "It gave me a fright."

Hilario resumed his instructions: "If anything goes wrong, wait here. Don't ride away until we have time—"

"Never fear. I won't desert you," the American reassured him.

The two white-clad figures slipped away, became indistinct, and then disappeared. The night was hot, the mosquitoes hummed dismally and settled in clouds upon the waiting pair, maddening them with their poison. After a time a horse snorted and Jacket cursed nervously.

"I'd like to see where we are," the boy muttered.

"Do you know these men?" O'Reilly asked him.

"No. God deliver me from such unpleasant fellows."

"I hope they're honest."

"Humph! I trust nobody." There was a pause. "Never mind," Jacket assured his companion. "I will make short work of them if they prove to be traitors."

A half-hour passed, then the two ghostly figures materialized once more.

"Dios!" grumbled Hilario. "There are many strings to this Spanish guitar. What a row when they discover that I have played a Cuban danzon upon it." The old man seemed less surly than before, and O'Reilly felt ashamed of his recent suspicions.

"Is the way clear?" he inquired.

"As far as the railroad, yes. We heard voices there, and came back. We will have to cut our way forward after we cross the track. Now then, follow me without a sound."

Leading his horse by the bit ring, Hilario moved out into the clearing, followed once more by his three companions. Concealment was out of the question now, for their only covering was the darkness. O'Reilly had the uncomfortable feeling that the cavalcade bulked monstrous big and must be visible at a great distance; he experienced much the sensations of a man crossing a sheet of thin ice with nerves painfully strained, awaiting the first menacing crack. In spite of all precautions the animals made a tremendous racket, or so it seemed, and, despite Hilario's twistings and turnings, it was impossible to avoid an occasional loop of barbed wire, therefore flesh and clothing suffered grievously. But at length the party brought up under the railroad embankment and paused. Out of the voids to their right came a faint murmur of voices. As carefully as might be the four men ascended the slope, crossed the rails, and descended into the ditch on the other side. Another moment and they encountered a taut strand of barbed wire. The metallic snip of Hilario's shears sounded like a pistol-shot to O'Reilly. Into the maze of strands they penetrated, yard by yard, clipping and carefully laying back the wire as they went. Progress was slow; they had to feel their way; the sharp barbs brought blood and muttered profanity at every step.

None of the four ever knew what gave the alarm. Their first intimation of discovery came with a startling

"Quien vive?" hurled at them from somewhere at their backs.

An instant and the challenge was followed by a Mauser shot. Other reports rang out as the sentry emptied his rifle in their direction.

"So! They are shooting-bats," Hilario grunted.

Antonio swung about and cocked his Remington, but the other spoke sharply. "Fool! If you shoot they will see the fire and riddle us. A curse on the spider that spun this web!"

It was a test of courage to crouch among the charred stumps, enmeshed in that cruel tangle of wire, while the night was stabbed by daggers of fire and while the *trocha* awoke to the wild alarm. From somewhere in the distance came a shouted command and the sound of running feet, suddenly putting an end to further inaction. Antonio began to hack viciously with his machete, in an effort to aid Hilario's labors. The sound of his sturdy blows betrayed the party's whereabouts so clearly that finally the older man could restrain himself no longer.

"Give it to them, compadres; it is a game that we can play."

O'Reilly had been gripping his rifle tensely, his heart in his throat, his pulses pounding. As near a panic as he had ever been, he found, oddly enough, that the mere act of throwing his weapon to his shoulder and firing it calmed him. The kick of the gun subdued his excitement and cleared his brain. He surprised himself by directing Jacket in a cool, authoritative voice, to shoot low. When he had emptied the magazine he led two of the horses forward. Then, grasping his own machete, he joined in clearing a pathway.

It seemed an interminable time ere they extricated themselves from the trap, but finally they succeeded and gained the welcome shelter of the woods, pausing inside its shelter to cut the muffles from their horses' feet. By this

time the defenders of the *trocha* were pouring volley after volley at random into the night.

Hilario sucked the cuts in his horny palms and spat forth the blood.

"If Gomez had the ammunition these fools are wasting he would free Cuba in no time."

Now that the skirmish was over, Jacket began to boast of his part in it.

"Ha! Perhaps they'll know better than to show themselves the next time I come this way," said he. "You saw me, didn't you? Well, I made a few Spanish widows to-night."

"Not many, I'm afraid," O'Reilly laughed.

"Oh, believe me, I'm an old hand at this sort of thing. I shoot just as well at night as I do in the daytime." This was literally true, and when no one disputed his assertion Jacket proceeded further in praise of himself, only to break off with a wordless cry of dismay.

"What's the matter?" Johnnie inquired.

"Look! Behold me!" wailed the hero. "I have left the half of my beautiful trousers on that barbed wire!"

Antonio swung a leg over his saddle, saying: "Come along, amigos; we have fifty leagues ahead of us. The war will be over while we stand here gossiping."

XXIII

INTO THE CITY OF DEATH

O'REILLY'S adventures on his swift ride through Las Villas have no part in this story. It is only necessary to say that they were numerous and varied, that O'Reilly experienced excitement aplenty, and that upon more than one occasion he was forced to think and to act quickly in order to avoid a clash with some roving guerrilla band. He had found it imperative at all times to avoid the larger towns, for they, and in fact most of the hamlets, were unsafe; hence the little party was forced to follow back roads and obscure bridle trails. But the two guides were never at a loss; they were resourceful, courageous, and at no time did the American have reason to doubt their faithfulness.

Evidences of the war increased as the journey lengthened. The *potreros* were lush with grass, but no herds grazed upon them; villages were deserted and guano huts were falling into decay, charred fields growing up to weeds and the ruins of vast *centrales* showing where the Insurrectos had been at work. This was the sugar country, the heart of Cuba, whence Spain had long drawn her life blood, and from the first it had been the policy of the rebel leaders to destroy the large estates, leaving undamaged only the holdings of those little farmers whose loyalty to the cause of freedom was unquestioned.

Food became a problem immediately after the travelers had crossed the *trocha*. Such apprehensive families as still lurked in the woods were liberal enough—Antonio, by

the way, knew all of them—but they had little to give and, in consequence, O'Reilly's party learned the taste of wild fruits, berries, and palmetto hearts. Once they managed to kill a small pig, the sole survivor of some obscure country tragedy, but the rest of the time their meat, when there was any, consisted of iguanas—those big, repulsive lizards—and *jutias*, the Cuban field-rats.

Neither the lizards nor the rats were quite as bad as they looked or sounded; the meat of the former was tender and white, while the latter, although strong, was not unpalatable. To hungry men both were *muy sabrosa*, as Jacket put it. This was not the boy's first experience with such a diet; having campaigned before in the west, he was accustomed to the taste of *juita*, and he told O'Reilly how his troop had once lived so long upon these rats that it became impossible to surprise a Spanish enemy, except by approaching up the wind, as a hunter stalks his game. Jacket gravely assured his friend that the Spaniards could smell him and his brother patriots from a distance of five kilometers—a statement, by the way, which the American by this time was ready to believe.

Fortunately there was no shortage of food for the horses, and so, despite the necessity of numerous détours, the party made good time. They crossed into Matanzas, pushed on over rolling hills, through sweeping savannas, past empty clearings and deserted villages, to their journey's end. A fortunate encounter with a rebel *partida* from General Betancourt's army enabled them to reach headquarters without loss of time, and one afternoon, worn, ragged and hungry, they dismounted in front of that gallant officer's hut.

General Betancourt read the letter which O'Reilly handed him, then looked up with a smile.

"So! You are one of Gomez's Americans, eh? Well, I would never have known it, to look at you; the sun and

the wind have made you into a very good Cuban. And your clothes— One might almost mistake you for a Cuban cabinet officer."

O'Reilly joined in the laughter evoked by this remark. He was quite as tattered as the poorest of Betancourt's common soldiers; his shoes were broken and disreputable; his cotton trousers, snagged by barbed wire and brambles, and soiled by days in the saddle and nights in the grass, were in desperate need of attention. His beard had grown, too, and his skin, where it was exposed, was burnt to a mahogany brown. Certainly there was nothing about his appearance to bespeak his nationality.

The general continued: "I am directed in this letter to help you in some enterprise. Command me, sir."

As briefly as possible Johnnie made known the object of his journey. The officer nodded his comprehension, but as he did so a puzzled expression crossed his face.

"Yes, I reported that Miss Varona had gone into the city—I took some pains to find out. Do you have reason to doubt—"

"Not the least, sir."

"Then—why have you come all this way?"

"I came to find her and to fetch her to her brother."

"But—you don't understand. She is actually inside the lines, in Matanzas—a prisoner."

"Exactly. I intend to go into Matanzas and bring her out."

General Betancourt drew back, astonished. "My dear man!" he exclaimed. "Are you mad?"

O'Reilly smiled faintly. "Quite probably. All lovers are mildly mad, I believe."

"Ah! Lovers! I begin to see. But—how do you mean to go about this—this—impossible undertaking?"

"You told me just now that I could pass for a Cuban. Well, I am going to put it to the test. If I once get into

the city I shall manage somehow to get out again, and bring her with me."

"Um-m!" The general appraised O'Reilly speculatively. No doubt you can get in—it is not so difficult to enter, I believe, and especially to one who speaks the language like a native. But the return—I fear you will find that another matter. Matanzas is a place of pestilence, hunger, despair. No one goes there from choice any more, and no one ever comes out."

"So I should imagine." The speaker's careless tone added to General Betancourt's astonishment. "Bless me!" he exclaimed. "What an extraordinary young man! Is it possible that you do not comprehend the terrible conditions?" A sudden thought struck him and he inquired, quickly: "Tell me, you are not by any chance that hero they call El Demonio? I have heard that he is indeed a demon. No? Very well! You say you wish to visit Matanzas, and I am instructed to help you. How can I do so?"

O'Reilly hesitated an instant. "For one thing, I need money. I—I haven't a single peseta."

"You are welcome to the few dollars I possess."

Johnnie expressed his gratitude for this ready assistance. "One thing more," said he. "Will you give my boy, Jacket, a new pair of trousers and send him back to the Orient at the first opportunity?"

"Of course. It is done." The general laid a friendly hand upon O'Reilly's shoulder, saying, gravely: "It would relieve me intensely to send you back with him, for I have fears for the success of your venture. Matanzas is a hell; it has swallowed up thousands of our good countrymen; thousands have died there. I'm afraid you do not realize what risks you are taking."

O'Reilly did not allow this well-meant warning to influence him, nor did he listen to the admonitions of those other Cubans who tried to argue him out of his purpose,

once it became generally known. On the contrary, he proceeded with his preparations and spent that afternoon in satisfying himself that Rosa had indeed left the Pan de Matanzas before Cobo's raid.

Among Betancourt's troops was a man who had been living in the hills at the time Asensio and his family had abandoned their struggle for existence, and to him O'Reilly went. This fellow, it seemed, had remained with his family in the mountains some time after Asensio's departure. It was from him that O'Reilly heard his first authentic report of the atrocities perpetrated by Cobo's Volunteers. This man had lost his wife, his little son, and all the scanty belongings he possessed. With shaking hands upstretched to heaven, the fellow cursed the author of his misfortunes.

"I live for one thing!" he cried, shrilly. "To meet that monster, and to butcher him, as he butchers women and children."

O'Reilly purposely left his most unpleasant task to the last. When his arrangements had been completed and he had acquainted himself as far as possible with the hazards he was likely to encounter, he took Jacket aside and broke the news to him that on the following morning they must part. As he had expected, the boy refused to listen to him. O'Reilly remained firm and Jacket adopted those tactics which had proved so potent with General Gomez. He began to weep copiously. He worked himself up to a hysterical crescendo which threatened to arouse the entire encampment. But O'Reilly was unmoved.

"Be quiet," he told the boy. "I won't let you go with me, and that ends it."

"You *dassent* leave me," sobbed the youngster. "I got no friend but you."

"It will be hard enough for one man to slip through; two would be sure to fail."

"Those Spaniards will skill you!" Jacket wailed.

"So much the more reason for you to stay here."

At this the boy uttered a louder cry. He stamped his bare feet in a frenzy of disappointment. "You dassent leave me—you *dassent!*"

"Listen, people are starving in Matanzas; they are sick; they are dying in the streets."

"I don't eat much."

When Johnnie shook his head stubbornly Jacket launched himself into a torrent of profanity the violence of which dried his tears. His vocabulary was surprising. He reviled the Spaniards, O'Reilly, himself, everybody and everything; he leveled anathemas at that woman who had come between him and his beloved benefactor. The latter listened good-naturedly.

"You're a tough kid," he laughed, when Jacket's first rage had worn itself out. "I like you, and I'd take you if I could. But this isn't an enterprise for a boy, and it won't get you anything to keep up this racket."

Jacket next tried the power of argument. He attempted to prove that in a hazardous undertaking of this sort his assistance would be invaluable. He was, so he declared, the one person in all Cuba in every respect qualified to share O'Reilly's perils. To begin with, he was not afraid of Spaniards, or anything else, for that matter—he dismissed the subject of personal courage with a contemptuous shrug. As for cunning, sagacity, prudence, resource, all-around worth, he was, without doubt, unequaled in any country. He was a veritable Spartan, too, when it came to hardship—privation and suffering were almost to his liking. He was discreet—discretion was something he had inherited; he was a diplomat—diplomacy being one of his most unique accomplishments. As for this talk about hunger, O'Reilly need not concern himself in the least on that score, for Jacket was a small eater and could grow fat on a diet of

dead leaves. Disease? Bah! It made him laugh. His experience with sickness was wider than most *fisicos*, and he was a better nurse than Miss Evans would ever be. Jacket did not wish to appear in the least boastful. On the contrary, he was actually too modest, as his friends could attest, but truth compelled him to admit that he was just the man for O'Reilly. He found it impossible to recommend himself too highly; to save his soul, he could think of no qualification in which he was lacking and could see no reason why his benefactor would not greatly profit by the free use of his amazing talents. The enterprise was difficult; it would certainly fail without him.

Johnnie remained carefully attentive during this adjuration. He felt no desire even to smile, for the boy's earnestness was touching and it caused the elder man's throat to tighten uncomfortably. Johnnie had not realized before how fond he had become of this quaint youngster. And so, when the little fellow paused hopefully, O'Reilly put an arm around him.

"I'm sure you are everything you say you are, Jacket, and more, too, but you can't go!"

With that Jacket flung off the embrace and, stalking away, seated himself. He took a half-smoked cigar from the pocket of his shirt and lit it, scowling the while at his friend. More than once during the evening O'Reilly detected his sullen, angry eyes upon him.

General Betancourt and several members of his staff were up early the following morning to bid their visitor good-by. In spite of their efforts to make the parting cheerful it was plain that they had little hope of ever again seeing this foolhardy American.

Johnnie's spirits were not in the least affected by this ill-concealed pessimism, for, as he told himself, he had money in his pockets and Matanzas was not many miles away. But when he came to part from Jacket he experi-

enced a genuine disappointment. The boy, strangely enough, was almost indifferent to his leaving; he merely extended a limp and dirty hand, and replied to O'Reilly's parting words with a careless "Adios!"

In hurt surprise the former inquired, "Don't we part good friends?"

"Sure!" Jacket shrugged, then turned away.

Jacket was a likable youngster; his devotion was thoroughly unselfish; it had not been easy to wound him. With keener regrets than he cared to acknowledge O'Reilly set out upon his journey, following the guide whom General Betancourt had provided.

It was a lovely morning, sufficiently warm to promise a hot midday; the air was moist and fresh from a recent shower. This being the rainy season, the trails were soft, and where the rich red Cuban soil was exposed the travelers sank into it as into wet putty.

Crossing a rocky ridge, O'Reilly and his guide at last emerged upon an open slope, knee-high in grass and grown up to bottle-palms, those queer, distorted trees whose trunks are swollen into the likeness of earthen water-jars. Scattered here and there over the meadows were the dead or fallen trunks of another variety, the cabbage-palm, the green heart of which had long formed a staple article of diet for the Insurrectos. Spanish axes had been at work here and not a single tree remained alive. The green floor of the valley farther down was dotted with the other, the royal kind, that monarch of tropic vegetation which lends to the Cuban landscape its peculiar and distinctive beauty.

"Yonder is the camino," said the countryman, pointing into the valley; "it will lead you to the main road; and there"—he turned to the northward—"is Matanzas. Go with God, and don't drink the well water, which is polluted from the rains." With a smile and a wave of the hand the man turned back and plunged into the jungle.

As O'Reilly descended the slope he realized keenly that he was alone and in hostile territory. The hills and the woods from Pinar del Rio to Oriente were Cuban, or, at most, they were disputed ground. But here in the plains and valleys near the cities Spain was supreme. From this moment on O'Reilly knew he must rely entirely upon himself. The success of his enterprise—his very life—hinged upon his caution, his powers of dissimulation, his ability to pass as a harmless, helpless *pacifico*. It gave him an unaccustomed thrill, by no means pleasant.

The road, when he came to it, proved to be a deep gutter winding between red-clay banks cut by the high wheels of clumsy cane-carts. Inasmuch as no crops whatever had been moved over the road during the past season, it was now little more than an oozy, sticky rut. Not a roof, not a chimney, was in sight; the valley was deserted. Here was a fertile farming country—and yet no living thing, no sound of bells, no voices, no crowing cocks, no lowing cattle. It was depressing to O'Reilly, and more, for there was something menacing and threatening about it all.

Toward noon the breeze lessened and it became insufferably hot. A bank of clouds in the east promised a cooling shower, so Johnnie sought the nearest shade to wait for it, and took advantage of the delay to eat his slender lunch. He was meditatively munching a sweet-potato when a sound at his back caused him to leap to his feet in alarm. He whirled, then uttered an exclamation of amazement. Seated not fifty feet away was a bare-legged boy, similarly engaged in eating a sweet-potato. It was Jacket. His brown cheeks were distended, his bright, inquisitive eyes were fixed upon O'Reilly from beneath a defiant scowl.

"Jacket!" cried the man. "What the devil are you doing here?"

"You goin' to let me come along?" challenged the intruder.

"So! You followed me, after I said I didn't want you?" O'Reilly spoke reproachfully; but reproaches had no effect upon the lad. With a mild expletive, Jacket signified his contempt for such a weak form of persuasion.

"See here now." O'Reilly stepped closer. "Let's be sensible about this."

But Jacket scrambled to his feet and retreated warily, stuffing the uneaten portion of the sweet-potato into his mouth. It was plain that he had no confidence in O'Reilly's intentions. Muttering something in a muffled voice, he armed himself with a stout stick.

"Come here," commanded the American.

Jacket shook his head. He made a painful attempt to swallow, and when his utterance became more distinct he consigned his idol to a warmer place than Cuba.

"I'm a tough kid," he declared. "Don't get gay on me."

The two parleyed briefly; then, when satisfied that no violence was intended him, the boy sat down to listen. But, as before, neither argument nor appeal had the slightest effect upon him. He denied that he had followed his benefactor; he declared that he was a free agent and at liberty to go where he willed. If it so chanced that his fancy took him to the city of Matanzas at the same time O'Reilly happened to be traveling thither, the circumstance might be put down to the long arm of coincidence. If his company were distasteful to the elder man, O'Reilly was free to wait and follow later; it was a matter of complete indifference to Jacket. He had business in Matanzas and he proposed to attend to it. The boy lied gravely, unblushingly. Nevertheless, he kept a watchful eye upon his hearer.

"Very well," O'Reilly told him, finally. "I give in."

Jacket's face instantly lit up. He radiated good humor; he hitched his body closer.

"By ——! I get my own way, don't I?" he laughed.

"Indeed you do." O'Reilly laid a hand fondly upon his loyal follower. "And I don't mind telling you that I'm more than half glad of it. I—I was getting lonesome. I didn't know how much I could miss you. But now we must make some plans, we must have an understanding and decide who we are. Let me see—your real name is Narciso—"

"Narciso Villar."

"Well, then, I shall be Juan Villar, your brother. Henceforth we shall speak nothing but Spanish. Tell me now, what was our father's name, where was our home, and what are we doing together?"

During the breathless interval before the shower the two sat with their heads together, talking earnestly. As the wind came and the cooling rain began to rattle on the leaves overhead they took up their bundles and set out. The big drops drenched them quickly. Their thin garments clung to them and water streamed down their bodies; overhead the sky was black and rent by vivid streaks of fire, but they plodded onward cheerfully.

Jacket was himself again; he bent his weight against the tempest and lengthened his short strides to O'Reilly's. He tried to whistle, but his teeth chattered and the wind interfered, so he hummed a song, to drive the chill out of his bones and to hearten his benefactor. Now that he was at last accepted as a full partner in this enterprise, it became his duty not only to share its perils, but to lessen its hardships and to yield diversion.

The rain was cold, the briers beside the overgrown path were sharp, and they scratched the boy's bare legs cruelly; his stomach clamored for a companion to that solitary sweet-potato, too, but in his breast glowed ardor and pride. Jacket considered himself a fortunate person—a very fortunate person, indeed. Had he not found a brother, and did not that brother love him? There was no doubt about the latter, for O'Reilly's eyes, when he

looked down, were kind and smiling, his voice was friendly and intimate. Here was a man to die for.

The downpour lasted but a short time, then the sun came out and dried the men's clothes; on the whole, it had been refreshing. When evening came the Villar brothers sought refuge in an old sugar-mill, or rather in a part of it still standing. They were on the main *calzada* now, the paved road which links the two main cities of the island, and by the following noon their destination was in sight.

O'Reilly felt a sudden excitement when Matanzas came into view. From this distance the city looked quite as it did when he had left it, except that the blue harbor was almost empty of shipping, while the familiar range of hills that hid the Yumuri—that valley of delight so closely linked in his thoughts with Rosa Varona—seemed to smile at him like an old friend. For the thousandth time he asked himself if he had come in time to find her, or if fate's maddening delays had proved his own and the girl's undoing.

O'Reilly knew that although Matanzas was a prison and a pesthole, a girl like Rosa would suffer therein perils infinitely worse than imprisonment or disease. It was a thought he could not bear to dwell upon.

Signs of life began to appear now, the travelers passed small garden-patches and occasional cultivated fields; they encountered loaded carts bound into the city, and once they hid themselves while a column of mounted troops went by.

O'Reilly stopped to pass the time of day with a wrinkled cartman whose dejected oxen were resting.

"Going into the city, are you?" the fellow inquired. "Starved out, I suppose. Well, it's as pleasant to starve in one place as another."

Jacket helped himself to a stalk of cane from the load and began to strip it with his teeth.

"Will the soldiers allow us to enter?" Johnnie inquired.

"Of course. Why not?" The old man laughed mirthlessly; then his voice changed. "Go back," he said, "go back and die in the fields. Matanzas stinks of rotting corpses. Go back where the air is clean." He swung his long lash over the oxen, they leaned against the load, and the cart creaked dismally on its way.

It is never difficult to enter a trap, and Matanzas was precisely that. There were soldiers everywhere, but beyond an indifferent challenge at the outer blockhouse, a perfunctory question or two, Narciso and Juan Villar experienced no trouble whatever in passing the lines. Discipline, never strict at best, was extremely lax at the brick *fortinas* along the roads, and, since these two refugees were too poor to warrant search, they were waved onward by the sentries. They obeyed silently; in aimless bewilderment they shuffled along toward the heart of the city. Almost before they realized it they had run the gauntlet and had joined that army of misery, fifteen thousand strong. The hand of Spain had closed over them.

XXIV

ROSA

"LOOK!" Jacket clutched at O'Reilly and pointed a shaking finger. "More beggars! Cristo! And those little children!" The boy tried to laugh, but his voice cracked nervously. "Are they children, or gourds with legs under them?"

O'Reilly looked, then turned his eyes away. He and Jacket had reached the heart of Matanzas and were facing the public square, the *Plaza de la Libertad* it was called. O'Reilly knew the place well; every building that flanked it was familiar to him, from the vast, rambling Governor's Palace to the ornate *Casino Español* and the Grand Hotel, and time was when he had been a welcome visitor at all of them. But things were different now. Gone were the customary crowds of well-dressed, well-fed citizens; gone the rows of carriages which at this hour of the day were wont to circle the Plaza laden with the aristocracy of the city; gone was that air of cheerfulness and substance which had lent distinction to the place. Matanzas appeared poor and squalid, depressingly wretched; its streets were foul and the *Plaza de la Libertad*—grim mockery of a name—was crowded with a throng such as it had never held in O'Reilly's time, a throng of people who were, without exception, gaunt, listless, ragged. There was no afternoon parade of finery, no laughter, no noise; the benches were full, but their occupants were silent, too sick or too weak to move. Nor were there any romping children. There were, to be sure, vast

numbers of undersized figures in the square, but one needed to look twice to realize that they were not pygmies or wizened little old folks. It was not strange that Jacket had compared them to gourds with legs, for all were naked, and most of them had bodies swollen into the likeness of pods or calabashes. They looked peculiarly grotesque with their spidery legs and thin faces.

O'Reilly passed a damp hand across his eyes. "God!" he breathed. "She—she's one of these!"

He had not penetrated even thus far into the city without receiving a hint of what conditions must be, for in the outlying streets he had seen sights and smelled odors that had sickened him; but now that he was face to face with the worst, now that he breathed the very breath of misery, he could scarcely credit what he saw. A stench, indescribably nauseating, assailed him and Jacket as they mingled with the crowd, for as yet their nostrils were unused to poverty and filth. It was the rancid odor that arises from unwashed, unhealthy bodies, and it testified eloquently to the living-conditions of the prisoners. Hollow eyes and hopeless faces followed the two new-comers as they picked their way slowly along.

The *reconcentrados* overran Matanzas in an unclean swarm; streets and plazas were congested with them, for no attempt was made to confine them to their quarters. Morning brought them streaming down from the suburban slopes where they lived, evening sent them winding back; their days were spent in an aimless search for food. They snatched at crumbs and combed the gutters for crusts. How they managed to exist, whence came the food that kept life in their miserable bodies, was a mystery, even to the citizens of the city; no organized effort had been made to care for them and there was insufficient surplus food for half their number. Yet somehow they lived and lingered on.

Of course the city was not entirely peopled by the starving—as a matter of fact they formed scarcely one-fifth of the normal civil population—and the life of the city was going on a good deal as usual. Stores were open, at least there was a daily train from Habana, and the barracks were full of Spanish troops. It was from off the wastage of this normal population that these fifteen thousand prisoners were forced to live. Even this wastage was woefully inadequate, merely serving to prolong suffering by making starvation slower.

At the time of O'Reilly's arrival the sight presented by these innocent victims of war was appalling; it roused in him a dull red rage at the power which had wrought this crime and at the men who permitted it to continue. Spain was a Christian nation, he reflected; she had set up more crosses than any other, and yet beneath them she had butchered more people than all the nations of the earth combined. This monstrous, coldly calculating effort to destroy the entire Cuban people seemed to him the blackest infamy of all, and he wondered if it would be allowed to succeed.

Fortunately for the two friends, General Betancourt's generosity served to relieve them from any immediate danger of starvation. After making a few purchases and eating with the utmost frugality, they began their search. Later, they stretched themselves out to sleep on the stones beneath the *portales* of the railroad station.

They spent a horrid, harrowing night, for now the general distress was brought home to them more poignantly than ever. At dawn they learned that these people were actually dying of neglect. The faint light betrayed the presence of new corpses lying upon the station flagstones. From those still living, groans, sighs, sick mutterings rose until O'Reilly finally dragged his youthful companion out of the place.

"I can't stand that," he confessed. "I can't sleep when

people are starving to death alongside of me. This money burns my pocket. I—I—"

Jacket read his purpose and laid a detaining hand upon his arm.

"It will save *our* lives, too," he said, simply.

"Bah! We are men. There are women and children yonder—"

But Jacket's sensibilities were calloused, it seemed. "Of what use would your few pesetas be among so many?" he inquired. "God has willed this, and He knows what He is doing. Besides, your 'pretty one' is probably as hungry as are these people. No doubt we shall find that she, too, is starving."

O'Reilly slowly withdrew his hand from his pocket. "Yes! It's Rosa's money. But—come; I can't endure this."

He led the way back to the Plaza of Liberty and there on an iron bench they waited for the full day. They were very tired, but further sleep was impossible, for the death-wagons rumbled by on their way to collect the bodies of those who had died during the night.

Neither the man nor the boy ever wholly lost the nightmare memory of the next few days, for their search took them into every part of the *reconcentrado* districts. What they beheld aged them. Day after day, from dawn till dark, they wandered, peering into huts, staring into faces, asking questions until they were faint from fatigue and sick with disappointment.

As time passed and they failed to find Rosa Varona a terrible apprehension began to weigh O'Reilly down; his face grew old and drawn, his shoulders sagged, his limbs began to drag. It was all that Jacket could do to keep him going. The boy, now that there was actual need of him, proved a perfect jewel; his optimism never failed, his faith never faltered, and O'Reilly began to feel a dumb gratitude at having the youngster by his side.

Jacket, too, became thin and gray about the lips. But he complained not at all and he laughed a great deal. To him the morrow was always another day of brilliant promise toward which he looked with never-failing eagerness; and not for a single moment did he question the ultimate success of their endeavor. Such an example did much for the older man. Together they practised the strictest, harshest economy, living on a few cents a day, while they methodically searched the city from limit to limit.

At first O'Reilly concerned himself more than a little with the problem of escape, but as time wore on he thought less and less about that. Nor did he have occasion to waste further concern regarding his disguise. That it was perfect he proved when several of his former acquaintances passed him by and when, upon one occasion, he came face to face with old Don Mario de Castaño. Don Mario had changed; he was older, his flesh had softened, and it hung loosely upon his form. He appeared worried, harassed, and O'Reilly recalled rumors that the war had ruined him. The man's air of dejection seemed to bear out the story.

They had been enemies, nevertheless O'Reilly felt a sudden impulse to make himself known to the Spaniard and to appeal directly for news of Rosa's fate. But Don Mario, he remembered in time, had a reputation for vindictiveness, so he smothered the desire. One other encounter O'Reilly had reason to remember.

It so chanced that one day he and Jacket found themselves in the miserable rabble which assembled at the railroad station to implore alms from the incoming passengers of the Habana train. Few people were traveling these days, and they were, for the most part, Spanish officers to whom the sight of starving country people was no novelty. Now and then, however, there did arrive visitors from whom the spectacle of so much wretchedness wrung a contribution, hence there was always an ex-

pectant throng at the depot. On this occasion O'Reilly was surprised to hear the piteous whines for charity in the name of God turn suddenly into a subdued but vicious mutter of rage. Hisses were intermingled with vituperations, then the crowd fell strangely silent, parting to allow the passage of a great, thick-set man in the uniform of a Colonel of Volunteers. The fellow was unusually swarthy and he wore a black scowl upon his face, while a long puckering scar the full length of one cheek lifted his mouth into a crooked sneer and left exposed a glimpse of wolfish teeth.

O'Reilly was at a loss to fathom this sudden alteration of attitude, the whistle of indrawn breaths and the whispered curses, until he heard some one mutter the name, "Cobo." Then indeed he started and stiffened in his tracks. He fixed a fascinated stare upon the fellow.

Colonel Cobo seemed no little pleased by the reception he created. With his chest arched and his black eyes gleaming malevolently he swaggered through the press, clicking his heels noisily upon the stone flags. When he had gone Jacket voiced a vicious oath.

"So that is the butcher of babies!" exclaimed the boy. "Well, now, I should enjoy cutting his heart out."

O'Reilly's emotions were not entirely unlike those of his small companion. His lips became dry and white as he tried to speak.

"What a brute! That face— Ugh!"

He found himself shaking weakly, and discovered that a new and wholly unaccountable feeling of discouragement had settled upon him. He tried manfully to shake it off, but somehow failed, for the sight of Rosa's arch-enemy and the man's overbearing personality had affected him queerly. Cobo's air of confidence and authority seemed to emphasize O'Reilly's impotence and bring it forcibly home to him. To think of his lustful persecution of Rosa Varona, moreover, terrified him. The next day he re-

sumed his hut-to-hut search, but with a listlessness that came from a firm conviction that once again he was too late.

That afternoon found the two friends among the miserable hovels which encircled the foot of La Cumbre, about the only quarter they had not explored. Below lay San Severino, the execution-place; above was the site of the old Verona home. More than once on his way about the city O'Reilly had lifted his eyes in the direction of the latter, feeling a great hunger to revisit the scene of his last farewell to Rosa, but through fear of the melancholy effect it would have upon him he had thus far resisted the impulse. To-day, however, he could no longer fight the morbid desire and so, in spite of Jacket's protest at the useless expenditure of effort, he set out to climb the hill. Of course the boy would not let him go alone.

Little was said during the ascent. The La Cumbre road seemed very long and very steep. How different the last time O'Reilly had swung up it! The climb had never before tired him as it did now, and he reasoned that hunger must have weakened him even more than he realized. Jacket felt the exertion, too; he was short of breath and he rested frequently. O'Reilly saw that the boy's bare, brown legs had grown bony since he had last noticed them, and he felt a sudden pang at having brought the little fellow into such a plight as this.

"Well, hombre," he said when they paused to rest, "I'm afraid we came too late. I'm afraid we're licked."

Jacket nodded listlessly; his optimism, too, was gone. "They must all be dead or we would have found them before this," said he. When O'Reilly made no answer he continued, "It is time we thought of getting away from here, eh?"

Johnnie was sitting with his face in his hands. Without lifting his head he inquired: "How are we going to get away? It is easy enough to get into Matanzas, but—" He shrugged hopelessly.

From where the two sat they could see on the opposite hillside a section of the ditch and the high barbed-wire fence which girdled the city and made of it a huge corral. Spaced at regular intervals along the intrenchments were slow-moving, diminutive figures, sentries on their well-worn paths.

Jacket brightened at the thought of escape. "Ho! I'll bet we can find a hole somewhere," said he. "We're not like these others. They haven't the spirit to try." There was a moment of silence, and then: "*Caramba!* You remember those jutias we ate? They were strong, but I would enjoy the smell of one now. Eh? Another week of this and we shall be living on garbage like the rest of these poor people."

Leaving Jacket to take his time, Johnnie completed the climb alone, meditating upon the boy's words. "The spirit to try!" Where had his spirit gone, he wondered. Perhaps it had been crushed beneath the weight of misery he had beheld; surely he had seen enough. Hourly contact with sickness and misfortune on such a gigantic scale was enough to chill any one's hopes, and although his sensibilities had been dulled, his apprehensions had been quickened hour by hour. Now that he looked the matter squarely in the face, it seemed absurd to believe that a tender girl like Rosa Varona could long have withstood the hardships of this hideous place; stronger people than she had succumbed, by the hundreds. Even now the hospitals were full, the sick lay untended in their hovels. No one, so far as O'Reilly knew, had undertaken to estimate how fast they were dying or the number of dead which had already ridden out of Matanzas in those rumbling wagons, but there were many. What chance was there that Rosa had not been among the latter? Better by far had she remained among the empty fields and the barren slopes of the Pan de Matanzas, for there at least the soil held roots and the trees bore fruits or

berries, while here was nothing but gaunt famine and grinning disease.

As he breasted the summit of La Cumbre, O'Reilly beheld at some distance a bent figure of want. It was a negro woman, grubbing in the earth with a sharpened stick. After a suspicious scrutiny of him she resumed her digging.

Nothing but a heap of stones and plaster remained of the Varona home. The grounds, once beautiful even when neglected as in Doña Isabel's time, were now a scene of total desolation. A few orange-trees, to be sure, remained standing, and although they were cool and green to look at, they carried no fruit and the odor of their blooms was a trial and a mockery to the hungry visitor. The evidences of Cueto's vandalism affected O'Reilly deeply; they brought him memories more painful than he had anticipated. Although the place was well-nigh unrecognizable, nevertheless it cried aloud of Rosa, and the unhappy lover could barely control the emotions it awakened. It was indeed a morbid impulse which had brought him thither, but now that he was here he could not leave. Unconsciously his feet turned toward the ancient quarry which had formed the sunken garden—his and Rosa's trysting-place.

O'Reilly desired above all things to be alone at this moment, and so he was annoyed to discover that another person was before him—a woman, evidently some miserable *pacifico* like himself. She, too, appeared to be looking for roots, and he almost stumbled over her as he brushed through the guava-bushes fringing the depression.

His sudden appearance alarmed the creature and she struggled, panic-stricken, out of his path. Her rags could not conceal the fact that she was deformed, that her back was crooked, so he muttered a reassuring word to her.

This place was more as he had left it—there was the

stone bench where he had said good-by to Rosa; yonder was the well—

"Señor!" Johnnie heard himself addressed by the hunch-backed woman. Her voice was thin, tremulous, eager, but his thoughts were busy and he paid no heed. "Señor! Do you look for something—some one—"

"N-no. Yes—" he answered, abstractedly. "Yes, I am looking for something—some one."

"Something you have lost?"

"Something I have lost!" The question came to him faintly, but it was so in tune with his unhappy mood that it affected him strangely. He found that his eyes were blurring and that an aching lump had risen into his throat. This was the breaking-point.

O'Reilly's hearing, too, was going wrong, for he imagined that some one whispered his name. God! This place was not dead—it was alive—terribly alive with memories, voices, a presence unseen yet real. He laid hold of the nearest bush to steady himself, he closed his eyes, only to hear his name spoken louder:

"O'Rail-ye!"

Johnnie brushed the tears from his lashes. He turned, he listened, but there was no one to be seen, no one, that is, except the dusky cripple who had straightened herself and was facing him, poised uncertainly. He looked at her a second time, then the world began to spin dizzily and he groped his way toward her. He peered again, closer, for everything before his eyes was swimming.

The woman was thin—little more than a skeleton—and so frail that the wind appeared to sway her, but her face, uplifted to the sun, was glorified. O'Reilly stood rooted, staring at her until she opened her eyes, then he voiced a great cry:

"*Rosa!*" What more he said he never knew . . .

He took the misshapen figure into his arms, he rained kisses upon the pinched, discolored face. But Rosa did

not respond; her puny strength had flown and she lay inert in his embrace, scarcely breathing. Tears stole down her cheeks and very faintly her fingers fluttered over his bearded cheeks.

Dazed, doubting, astounded, it was some time before Johnnie could convince himself of the reality of this moment, and even then words did not come to him, for his mind was in turmoil. Joy, thanksgiving, compassion—a thousand emotions—mingled in a sort of delirium, too wild for coherent thought or speech.

Fear finally brought him to his senses, for he became aware that Rosa had collapsed and that his endearments left her unthrilled. Quickly he bore her to the bench and laid her upon it. After a time she smiled up into his eyes and her words were scarcely more than a murmur:

"God heard my prayers and sent you to me."

"Rosa! You are ill, you are weak—"

Her eyelids fluttered. "I am dying, O'Rail-ye. I only waited to see you."

"No, no!" In agony he gathered her once more into his arms.

"Oh yes!" Her bloodless fingers touched his face again, then his thin, worn rags. "You, too, have suffered. How came you to be so poor and hungry, O'Rail-ye?"

"I'm not poor, I'm rich. See!" He jingled the coins in his pocket. "That's money; money for you, sweetheart. It will buy you food and medicine, it will make you well and strong again. Rosa, dear, I have looked for you so long, so long—" His voice broke wretchedly and he bowed his head. "I—I was afraid—"

"I waited as long as I had strength to wait," she told him. "It is too bad you came so late."

Once again she lapsed into the lethargy of utter weakness, whereupon he fell to stroking her hands, calling upon her to come back to him. He was beside himself now; a terrible feeling of impotence and despair overcame him.

Hearing some one speak, he raised his eyes and discovered at his side that figure of want which he had seen digging on the slope below. It was Evangelina. The negress was little more than skin and bones, her eyes were bleared and yellow and sunken, her face had grown ape-like, but he recognized her and she him.

"You are the American," she declared. "You are Rosa's man."

"Yes. But what is wrong with her? Look! She is ill—"

"She is often like that. It is the hunger. We have nothing to eat, señor. I, too, am ill—dying; and Asensio— Oh, you don't know how they have made us suffer."

"We must get Rosa home. Where do you live?"

Evangelina turned her death's head toward the city. "Down yonder. But what's the use? There is no food in our house and Rosa is afraid of those wagons. You know—the ones with the corpses. She made me bring her here to die."

The girl was not wholly unconscious, it seemed, for she stirred and murmured, faintly: "Those wagons! Don't let them put me in there with the other dead. They pile the bodies high—" A weak shudder convulsed her.

O'Reilly bent lower, and in a strong, determined voice cried: "You are not going to die. I have money for food. Rouse yourself, Rosa, rouse yourself."

"She prayed for you every night," the negress volunteered. "Such faith! Such trust! She never doubted that you would come and find her. Sometimes she cried, but that was because of her brother. Estéban, you know, is dead. Yes, dead, like all the rest."

"Estéban is *not* dead," O'Reilly asserted. "He is alive. Rosa, do you hear that? Estéban is alive and well. I left him with Gomez in the Orient. I have come to take you to him."

"Estéban alive? Ha! You are fooling us." Evangelina wagged her head wisely. "We know better than that."

"I tell you he *is* alive," O'Reilly insisted. He heard Jacket calling to him at that moment, so he hallooed to the boy; then when the latter had arrived he explained briefly, without allowing Jacket time in which to express his amazement:

"Our search is over; we have found them. But they won't believe that Estéban is alive. Tell them the truth."

"Yes, he is alive. We found him rotting in a prison and we rescued him," Jacket corroborated. He stared curiously at the recumbent figure on the bench, then at O'Reilly. He puckered his lips and gave vent to a low whistle of amazement. "So. This is your pretty one, eh? I— She— Well, I don't think much of her. But then, you are not so handsome yourself, are you?"

Evangelina seemed to be stupid, a trifle touched, perhaps, from suffering, for she laid a skinny claw upon O'Reilly's shoulder and warned him earnestly: "Look out for Cobo. You have heard about him, eh? Well, he is the cause of all our misery. He hunted us from place to place, and it was for him that I put that hump on her back. Understand me, she is straight—straight and pretty enough for any American. Her skin is like milk, too, and her hair—she used to put flowers in it for you, and then we would play games. But you never came. You will make allowances for her looks, will you not?"

"Poor Rosa! You two poor creatures!" O'Reilly choked; he hid his face upon his sweetheart's breast.

Rosa responded; her fingers caressed him and she sighed contentedly.

O'Reilly's ascent of the hill had been slow, but his descent was infinitely slower, for Rosa was so feeble that she could help herself but little and he lacked the strength

to carry her far at a time. Finally, however, they reached the wretched hovel where Asensio lay, then leaving her there, Johnnie sped on alone into the city. He returned soon with several small bundles concealed about his person, and with Evangelina's help he set about preparing food.

Neither Rosa nor the two negroes had any appetite—their hunger had long since passed the point at which they were conscious of it—and O'Reilly was compelled to force them to eat. When he had given them all that he dared he offered what food was left to Jacket.

The boy moistened his lips and his fingers twitched, but he shook his head.

"Oh, I'm not so hungry," he declared, indifferently. "I have a friend in the market-place; I will go down there and steal a fish from him."

O'Reilly patted him on the shoulder, saying: "You are a good kid, and you understand, don't you? These sick people will need more food than we can buy for them, so we will have to draw our belts tight."

"Of course. Eating is a habit, anyhow, and we men know how to get along without it. I will manage to find something for you and me, for I'm a prodigious thief. I can steal the hair from a man's head when I try." With a nod he set off to find his benefactor's supper.

Jacket whistled heroically until he was out of O'Reilly's hearing, then his bearing changed. His mouth drew down, and moisture came into his eyes. He rubbed a grimy hand over his stomach, murmuring, faintly: "Cristo! It is hard to be a man when you smell things cooking!"

XXV

THE HAUNTED GARDEN

ROSA VARONA did not die. On the contrary, under her lover's care she made so amazingly swift a recovery that improvement was visible from hour to hour; she rallied like a wilted flower under a refreshing rain. It was O'Reilly's presence as much as the nourishing diet provided by his money which effected this marvel, although the certainty that Estéban was alive and safe put added force into her determination to live. Rosa found hope springing up in her breast, and one day she caught herself laughing. The marvel of it was unbelievable. O'Reilly was sitting beside her bed of leaves at the time; impulsively she pressed his hand to her lips, repeating a question she had asked him many times:

"Do you love me?"

For answer he bent and kissed her. What he said was of no consequence.

Rosa held his hand against her cheek, at a loss for words with which to voice her gladness.

"Such happiness as mine belongs in heaven," she managed to tell him. "Sometimes it frightens me. With you by my side this prison is a paradise and I want for nothing. War, suffering, distress—I can't imagine they longer exist."

"Nevertheless, they do, and Matanzas is anything but a paradise," said he. "It is—hell, and we must set about quickly to get out of it."

"Escape, do you mean? But that is impossible.

Asensio can tell you all about that. The Spaniards used to issue passes for the men to go outside the lines in search of food. It was just a trick. They never came back—all of them were killed. Every one knows better than to try, now."

"Nevertheless, we can't stay here much longer." In answer to the girl's puzzled inquiry he explained: "My money is gone—all but a few cents. This is the last of our food and there is no chance of getting more. Jacket has some mysterious source of supply and he manages to bring in something every now and then, but there are five of us to feed, and he can't furnish more than enough for himself. No, we must make a move at once, while we have the strength."

Rosa had not asked the source whence came the blessed food which was bringing the life blood back into her body, and although that food was not much—a little meal, a plantain, an occasional scrap of meat or fish—it had never occurred to her that the supply might be limited. She met the problem bravely, however.

"I have been close to death so long that it means little to me," she confessed. "I have you, and—well, with you at my side I can face the worst."

"Oh, we won't give up until we have to," he assured her. "If I had money it would be a simple proposition to bribe some guard to pass us through the lines, but I have spent all that General Betancourt gave me." He smoothed back Rosa's dark hair and smiled reassuringly at her. "Well, I'll manage somehow; so don't worry your pretty head. I'll find the price, if I have to waylay old Don Mario and rob him. Don't you think I look like a bandit? The very sight of me would terrify that fat rascal."

"To me you are beautiful," breathed the girl. Then she lowered her eyes. "La, la! How I spoil you! I have quite forgotten how to be ladylike. Isabel was right when she called me a bold and forward hussy.

Now, then, please turn your face aside, for I wish to think, and so long as you look at me I cannot—I make love to you brazenly. See! Now, then, that is much better. I shall hold your hand, so. When I kiss it you may look at me again, for a moment." Drawing herself closer to O'Reilly, Rosa began thoughtfully: "Before you came I more than once was on the point of appealing to some of my former friends, but they are all Spaniards and we are no longer—simpatico, you understand?"

Rosa paused for his answer.

"Perfectly; I'm in the same fix. Of all the people I used to know there isn't one but would denounce me if I made myself known. Now that I've been fighting with the Insurrectos, I daren't even go to the American consul for help—if there is an American consul."

Rosa nodded, then continued, hesitatingly: "I had a vivid dream last night. Perhaps it was a portent. Who knows? It was about that stepmother of mine. You remember how she met her death? I wrote you—"

"Yes, and Estéban also told me."

"It was he who recovered her body from the well. One day, while we were in hiding, away up yonder in the Yumuri, he showed me an old coin—"

"I know," O'Reilly said, quickly. "He told me the whole story. He thinks that doubloon is a clue to your father's fortune, but—I can't put much faith in it. In fact, I didn't believe until this moment that there was a doubloon at all."

"Oh, indeed there was! I saw it."

"Then it wasn't merely a sick fancy of your brother's?"

"Indeed no, it—" Rosa broke off to exclaim, "O'Reilly, you are looking at me!"

"But you gave me the signal to look," he protested.

"Nothing of the sort; you placed your fingers upon my lips." There was a moment of silence during which the lovers were oblivious to all but each other, then Rosa

murmured: "How strange! Sometimes your eyes are blue and sometimes gray. Does that mean that your love, too, can change?"

"Certainly not. But come, what about Estéban and that doubloon?"

With an effort the girl brought herself back to earth. "Well, it occurred to me, in the light of that dream last night, that Estéban may have been right. Of course nobody outside of our family credits the old story, and yet my father was considered a very rich man at one time. Pancho Cueto believed in the existence of the treasure, and he was in a position to know."

"True! Perhaps, after all—" O'Reilly frowned meditatively.

Rosa lifted herself upon her elbow, her eyes sparkling. "Wouldn't it be wonderful if it were true? Just think, O'Reilly, cases of Spanish gold, silver coins in casks, packages of gems. Oh, I've heard Isabel talk about it often enough!"

"Don't forget those pearls from the Caribbean, as large as plums," Johnny smiled. "I could never quite swallow that. A pearl the size of a currant would buy our freedom right now." After a moment he went on, more seriously: "I've a notion to look into that old well this very afternoon. I—I dare say I'm foolish, but—somehow the story doesn't sound so improbable as it did. Perhaps it is worth investigating—" He made up his mind swiftly. "I—I'm off this very instant."

When O'Reilly emerged from the hut he found Jacket industriously at work over a fragment of grindstone which he had somewhere unearthed. The boy looked up at his friend's approach and held out for inspection a long, thin file, which he was slowly shaping into a knife-blade.

"What do you think of that?" he queried, proudly. "It may come in handy when we are ready to clear out of this pesthole."

"Where did you get it?"

"Oh, I stole it. I steal everything I can lay my hands on nowadays. One can never tell when he may have a throat to cut, and a file has good steel in it."

"Since you are such an accomplished thief, do you think you could steal something for me?" O'Reilly inquired. "A piece of rope?"

"Rope?" Jacket was puzzled. "Rope is only good for hanging Spaniards. My friend in the fish-market has a volandra, and—perhaps I can rob him of a halyard." Laying aside his task, Jacket arose and made off in the direction of the water-front. He was back within an hour, and under his shirt he carried a coil of worn, but serviceable, rope. Without waiting to explain his need for this unusual article, O'Reilly linked arms with the boy and set out to climb La Cumbre. When at last they stood in the unused quarry and Johnnie made known his intention to explore the old well Jacket regarded him with undisguised amazement.

"What do you expect to find down there?" the latter inquired.

"To tell you the truth, I don't really expect to find anything," the man confessed. "Now that I'm here, I'm beginning to feel silly; nevertheless, I'm going to have a look for the hidden treasure of the Varonas."

"Hidden treasure!" From Jacket's expression it was plain that he feared his friend was mildly mad. Even after O'Reilly had told him something about old Don Estéban's missing riches, he scouted the story. He peeped inquisitively into the dark opening of the well, then he shook his head. "*Caramba!* What an idea! Was this old man crazy, to throw his money away?"

"He—he had more than he knew what to do with, and he wished to save it from the Spaniards," O'Reilly explained, lamely.

"Humph! Nobody ever had more money than he

wanted." The boy's disgust at such credulity was plain. "This well looks just like any other, only deeper; you'd better look out that you don't break your neck like that foolish old woman, that Doña What's-Her-Name."

O'Reilly did indeed feel that he was making himself ridiculous, nevertheless he made the rope fast and swung himself down out of the sunlight, leaving Jacket to stand guard over him. Perhaps fifteen minutes later he reappeared, panting from his exertions. He was wet, slimy; his clothes were streaked and stained with mud. Jacket began to laugh shrilly at his appearance.

"Ha! What a big lizard is this? Your beautiful garments are spoiled. And the treasure? Where is it?" The lad was delighted. He bent double with mirth; he slapped his bare legs and stamped his feet in glee.

O'Reilly grinned good-naturedly, and replaced the planks which had covered the orifice, then hid the rope in some near-by bushes. On their way back he endured his young friend's banter absent-mindedly, but as they neared Asensio's house he startled Jacket by saying, "Can you manage to find a pick-ax or a crowbar?"

Jacket's eyes opened; he stopped in the middle of the dusty road. "What did you see down there, compadre? Tell me."

"Nothing much. Just enough to make me want to see more. Do you think you can steal some sort of a tool for me?"

"I can try."

"Please do. And remember, say nothing before Asensio or his wife."

Rosa met O'Reilly just inside the door, and at sight of her he uttered an exclamation of surprise, for during his absence she had removed the stain from her face and discarded that disfigurement which Evangelina had fitted to her back prior to their departure from the Pan de Matan-

zas. She stood before him now, straight and slim and graceful—the Rosa of his dreams, only very thin, very fragile. Her poor tatters only enhanced her prettiness, so he thought.

"Rosa dear! Do you think this is quite safe?" he ventured, doubtfully.

Evangelina, who was bending over her husband, straightened herself and came forward with a smile upon her black face.

"She is beautiful, eh? Too beautiful to look at? What did I tell you?"

Rosa was in delightful confusion at O'Reilly's evident surprise and admiration. "Then I'm not so altogether changed?" she asked.

"Why, you haven't changed at all, except to grow more beautiful. Evangelina is right; you are too beautiful to look at. But wait!" He drew her aside and whispered, "I've been down in the well." Some tremor in his voice, some glint in his eyes, caused the girl to seize him eagerly, fiercely. "I may be wrong," he said, hurriedly; "there may be nothing in it—and yet I saw something."

"What?"

"Wooden beams, timbers of some sort, behind the stone curbing." It was plain Rosa did not comprehend, so he hurried on. "At first I noticed nothing unusual, except that the bottom of the well is nearly dry—filled up, you know, with debris and stuff that has fallen in from the curbing above, then I saw that although the well is dug through rock, nevertheless it is entirely curbed up with stones laid in mortar. That struck me as queer."

"Yes?"

"I noticed, too, in one place that there was wood behind—as if timbers had been placed there to cover the entrance to a cave. You know this Cuban rock is full of caverns."

Rosa clasped her hands, she began to tremble. "You have found it, O'Reilly. You *have!*" she whispered.

"No, no, I've found nothing yet. But I've sent Jacket for a pick or a bar and to-night I'm going to pull down those stones and see what is behind them."

"To-night? You must let me go, too. I want to help."

"Very well. But meanwhile you mustn't let your hopes rise too high, for there is every chance that you will be disappointed. And don't mention it to Evangelina. Now then, I've a few pennies left and I'm going to buy some candles."

Rosa embraced her lover impulsively. "Something tells me it is true! Something tells me you are going to save us all."

Evangelina in the far corner of the hut muttered to her husband: "Such love-birds! They are like parrakeets, forever kissing and cooing!"

Jacket returned at dusk and with him he brought a rusty three-foot iron bar, evidently part of a window grating. The boy was tired, disgusted, and in a vile temper. "A pick-ax! A crowbar!" He cursed eloquently. "One might as well try to steal a cannon out of San Severino. I'm ready to do anything within reason, but—"

"Why, this will do nicely; it is just what I want," O'Reilly told him.

"Humph! I'm glad to hear it, for that rod was nearly the death of me. I broke my back wrenching at it and the villain who owned the house—may a bad lightning split him!—he ran after me until I nearly expired. If my new knife had been sharp I would have turned and sent him home with it between his ribs. To-morrow I shall put an edge on it. Believe me, I ran until my lungs burst."

Little food remained in the hut, barely enough for Asensio and the women, and inasmuch as O'Reilly had

spent his last centavo for candles he and Jacket were forced to go hungry again. Late that evening, after the wretched prison quarters had grown quiet, the three treasure-hunters stole out of their hovel and wound up the hill. In spite of their excitement they went slowly, for none of them had the strength to hurry. Fortunately, there were few prowlers within the lines, hunger having robbed the *reconcentrados* of the spirit to venture forth, and in consequence Spanish vigilance had relaxed; it was now confined to the far-flung girdle of intrenchments which encircled the city. The trio encountered no one.

Leaving Jacket on guard at the crest of the hill, O'Reilly stationed Rosa at the mouth of the well, then lowered himself once more into it. Lighting his candle, he made a careful examination of the place, with the result that Estéban's theory of the missing riches seemed even less improbable than it had earlier in the day. The masonry-work, he discovered, had been done with a painstaking thoroughness which spoke of the abundance of slave labor, and time had barely begun to affect it. Here and there a piece of the mortar had loosened and come away, but for the most part it stood as solid as the stones between which it was laid. Shoulder-high to O'Reilly there appeared to be a section of the curbing less smoothly fitted than the rest, and through an interstice in this he detected what seemed to be a damp wooden beam. At this point he brought his iron bar into play.

It was not long before he discovered that his work was cut out for him. The cement was like flint and his blunt makeshift implement was almost useless against it. Ankle-deep in the muddy water, he patiently pecked and pounded and chipped, endeavoring to enlarge the crevice so as to use his bar as a lever. The sweat streamed from him and he became dismayed at his own weakness. He was forced to rest frequently.

Rosa hung over the orifice above, encouraging him, in-

quiring eagerly as to his progress. During his frequent breathing-spells he could discern her white face dimly illumined by the candle-light from below.

After he had worked for an hour or two, he made a report: "It begins to look as if there really was a bulkhead or a door in there."

The girl clapped her hands and laughed with delight. "Do hurry, dear; I'm dying of suspense."

O'Reilly groaned: "That fellow, Sebastian, knew his business. This cement is like steel, and I'm afraid of breaking my crowbar."

Rosa found a leaf, folded a kiss into it, and dropped it to him. "That will give you strength," she declared.

O'Reilly lost all count of time after a while and he was incredulous when Jacket came to warn him that daylight was less than an hour away. "Why, I haven't started!" he protested. He discovered, much to his surprise, that he was ready to drop from fatigue and that his hands were torn and blistered; when he had climbed the rope to the upper air he fell exhausted in the deep grass. "I—I'm not myself at all," he apologized; "nothing to eat, you know. But the work will go faster now, for I've made a beginning."

"Do you still think—" Rosa hesitated to voice the question which trembled on her lips.

"I'll know for sure to-night." He directed Jacket to replace the planks over the well; then the three of them stole away.

O'Reilly spent most of that day in a profound stupor of exhaustion, while Rosa watched anxiously over him. Jacket, it seemed, had peacefully slumbered on picket duty, so he occupied himself by grinding away at his knife. The last scraps of food disappeared that evening.

When night fell and it came time to return to the top of La Cumbre, O'Reilly asked himself if his strength would prove sufficient for the task in hand. He was spiritless,

sore, weak; he ached in every bone and muscle, and it required all his determination to propel himself up the hill. He wondered if he were wise thus to sacrifice his waning energies on a hope so forlorn as this, but by now he had begun to more than half believe in the existence of the Varona treasure and he felt an almost irresistible curiosity to learn what secret, if any, was concealed behind those water-soaked timbers at the bottom of the well. He realized, of course, that every hour he remained here, now that food and money were gone, lessened the chances of escape; but, on the other hand, he reasoned, with equal force, that if he had indeed stumbled upon the missing hoard salvation for all of them was assured. The stake, it seemed to him, was worth the hazard.

Given tempered tools to work with, it would have been no great undertaking to tear down that cemented wall of stones, but, armed with nothing except his bare hands and that soft iron bar, O'Reilly spent nearly the whole night at his task. Long before the last rock had yielded, however, he beheld that which caused him to turn a strained face upward to Rosa.

"There's a little door, as sure as you live," he told her.

The girl was beside herself with excitement. "Yes? What else? What more do you see?"

"Nothing. It appears to be made of solid timbers, and has two huge hand-wrought locks."

"Locks! Then we *have* found it." Rosa closed her eyes; she swayed momentarily. "Estéban was right. Locks, indeed! That means something to hide. Oh, if I could only help you."

"God! If I only had something—*anything* to work with!" muttered the American as he fell to with redoubled energy. He no longer tried to conserve his strength, for the treasure-seeker's lust beset him. Rosa looked on, wringing her hands and urging him to greater haste.

But the low, thick door was built of some hard, native

wood: it was wet and tough and slippery. O'Reilly's blows made no impression upon it, nor upon the heavy hasps and staples with which it was secured in place. The latter were deeply rusted, to be sure, but they withstood his efforts, and he was finally forced to rest, baffled, enraged, half hysterical from weakness and fatigue.

Daylight was at hand once more, but he refused to give up, and worked on stubbornly, furiously, until Rosa, in an agony, besought him to desist.

Johnnie again collapsed on the grass and lay panting while the other two replaced the planks.

"Another hour and I'd have been into it," he declared, huskily.

"You will skill yourself," Jacket told him.

Rosa bent over him with shining eyes and parted lips. "Yes," said she. "Be patient. We will come back, O'Reilly, and to-night we shall be rich."

Colonel Cobo lit a black cigarette, leaned back in his chair, and exhaled two fierce jets of smoke through his nostrils. For a full moment he scowled forbiddingly at the sergeant who had asked to see him.

"What's this you are telling me?" he inquired, finally.

The sergeant, a mean-faced, low-browed man, stirred uneasily.

"It is God's truth. There are spirits on La Cumbre, and I wish to see the priest about it."

"Spirits? What kind of spirits?"

The fellow shrugged. "Evil spirits—spirits from hell. The men are buying charms."

"Bah! I took you to be a sensible person."

"You don't believe me? Well, I didn't believe them when they told me about it. But I saw with my own eyes."

Cobo leaned forward, mildly astonished. Of all his

villainous troop, this man was the last one he had credited with imagination of this sort. "What did you see?"

"A ghost, my Colonel, nothing else. La Cumbre is no place for an honest Christian."

The colonel burst into a mocking laugh. "An honest Christian! *You!* Of all my vile ruffians, you are the vilest. Why, you're a thief, a liar, and an assassin! You are lying to me now. Come—the truth for once, before I give you the componte."

"As God is my judge, I'm telling you the truth," protested the soldier. "Flog me if you will—rather the componte than another night in those trenches. You know that old quinta?"

"Where Pancho Cueto made a goat of himself? Perfectly. Do you mean to say that you saw old Estéban Varona walking with his head in his hands?"

"No, but I saw that she-devil who fell in the well and broke her neck."

"Eh? When did you behold this—this marvel?"

"Two nights ago. She was there beside the well and her face shone through the night like a lantern. Christ! There was fire upon it. She came and went, like a moth in the lamplight. I tell you I repented of my sins. Some of the men laughed at me when I told them, as they had laughed at the others. But last night two of the doubters went up there."

"Exactly. And they saw nothing."

"Your pardon, my Colonel. They came back in a cold sweat, and they spent the night on their knees. The woman was there again. You have seen the salt sea at night? Well, her face was aglow, like that, so they said. They heard the clanking of chains, too, and the sound of hammers, coming from the very bowels of the earth. It is all plain enough, when you know the story. But it is terrifying."

"This is indeed amazing," Cobo acknowledged, "but

of course there is some simple explanation. Spirits, if indeed there are such things, are made of nothing—they are like thin air. How, then, could they rattle chains? You probably saw some wretched pacificos in search of food and imagined the rest."

"Indeed! Then what did I hear with these very ears? Whispers, murmurs, groans, and the clinkety-clink of old Sebastian's chisel. For his sins that old slave is chained in some cavern of the mountain. Soundless! I'm no baby! I know when I'm asleep, and I know when I'm awake. That place is accursed, and I want no more of it."

Cobo fell into frowning meditation, allowing his cigarette to smolder down until it burned his thick fingers. He was not a superstitious man and he put no faith in the supernatural, nevertheless he was convinced that his sergeant was not lying, and reference to Pancho Cueto had set his mind to working along strange channels. He had known Cueto well, and the latter's stubborn belief in the existence of that Varona treasure had more than once impressed him. He wondered now if others shared that faith, or if by chance they had discovered a clue to the whereabouts of the money and were conducting a secret search. It was a fantastic idea, nevertheless Cobo told himself that if people were prying about those deserted premises it was with some object, and their actions would warrant observation. The presence of the woman—a woman—with the glow of phosphorus upon her face was puzzling, but the whole affair was puzzling. He determined to investigate. After a time he murmured, "I should like to see this spirit."

The sergeant shrugged. It was plain from his expression that he could not account for such a desire. "Another night is coming," said he.

"Good! I shall visit the place, and if I see anything unusual I—well, I shall believe what you have told me. Meanwhile, go see your priest by all means. It will do you no harm."

XXVI

HOW COBO STOOD ON HIS HEAD

ALL that day, or during most of it, at least, Rosa and O'Reilly sat hand in hand, oblivious of hunger and fatigue, impatient for the coming of night, keyed to the highest tension. Now they would rejoice hysterically, assuring each other of their good fortune, again they would grow sick with the fear of disappointment. Time after time they stepped out of the hut and stared apprehensively up the slopes of La Cumbre to assure themselves that this was not all a part of some fantastic illusion; over and over, in minutest detail, Johnnie described what he had seen at the bottom of the well. He tried more than once during the afternoon to sleep, but he could not, for the moment he closed his eyes he found himself back there in that pit upon the ridge's crest, straining at those stubborn rocks and slippery timbers. This inaction was maddening, his fatigue rendered him feverish and irritable.

Jacket, too, felt the strain, and after several fruitless attempts to sleep he rose and went out into the sunshine, where he fell to whetting his knife. He finished putting a double edge upon the blade, fitted a handle to it, and then a cord with which to suspend it round his neck. He showed it to O'Reilly, and after receiving a word of praise he crept out-doors again and tried to forget how sick he was. Black spots were dancing before Jacket's eyes; he experienced spells of dizziness and nausea during which he dared not attempt to walk. He knew this must be the result of starvation, and yet, strangely enough, the

thought of food was distasteful to him. He devoutly wished it were not necessary to climb that hill again, for he feared he would not have the strength to descend it.

Luckily for the sake of the secret, Evangelina spent most of the day searching for food, while Asensio lay babbling upon his bed, too ill to notice the peculiar actions of his companions.

It was with a strange, nightmare feeling of unreality that the trio dragged themselves upward to the ruined *quinta* when darkness finally came. They no longer talked, for conversation was a drain upon their powers, and the reaction from the day's excitement had set in. O'Reilly lurched as he walked, his limbs were heavy, and his liveliest sensation was one of dread at the hard work in store for him. The forcing of that door assumed the proportions of a Herculean task.

But once he was at the bottom of the well and beheld the handiwork of Sebastian, the slave, just as he had left it, his sense of reality returned and with it a certain measure of determination. Inasmuch as he had made no visible impression upon the bulkhead by his direct attack, he changed his tactics now and undertook to loosen one of the jambs where it was wedged into the rock at top and bottom. After a desperate struggle he succeeded in loosening the entire structure so that he could pry it out far enough to squeeze his body through.

"I have it!" he cried to Rosa. Seizing the candle, he thrust it into the opening. He beheld what he had expected to find, a small cavern or grotto which had evidently been pierced during the digging of the well. He could appreciate now how simple had been the task of sealing it up so as to baffle discovery. Rosa, poised above him, scarcely breathed until he straightened himself and turned his face upward once more.

He tried to speak, but voiced nothing more than a hoarse croak; the candle in his hand described erratic figures.

"What do you see?" the girl cried in an agony of suspense.

"I— It's here! B-boxes, chests, casks—everything!"

"God be praised! My father's fortune at last!"

Rosa forgot her surroundings; she beat her hands together, calling upon O'Reilly to make haste and determine beyond all question that the missing hoard was indeed theirs. She drew perilously close to the well and knelt over it like some priestess at her devotions; her eyes were brimming with tears and there was a roaring in her ears. It was not strange that she failed to see or to hear the approach of a great blurred figure which materialized out of the night and took station scarcely an arm's-length behind her.

"He intended it for his children," she sobbed, "and Providence saved it from our wicked enemies. It was the hand of God that led us here, O'Reilly. Tell me, what do you see now?"

Johnnie had wormed his way into the damp chamber and a slim rectangle of light was projected against the opposite side of the well. Rosa could hear him talking and moving about.

Don Estéban Varona's subterranean hiding-place was large enough to store a treasure far greater than his; it was perhaps ten feet in length, with a roof high enough to accommodate a tall man. At the farther end were ranged several small wooden chests bound with iron and fitted with hasps and staples, along one side was a row of diminutive casks, the sort used to contain choice wines or liquors; over all was a thick covering of slime and mold. The iron was deeply rusted and the place itself smelled abominably stale.

O'Reilly surveyed this Aladdin's cave in a daze. He set his candle down, for his fingers were numb and unsteady. Cautiously, as if fearful of breaking some spell, he stooped and tried to move one of the casks, but found

that it resisted him as if cemented to the rock. He noted that its head was bulged upward, as if by the dampness, so he took his iron bar and aimed a sharp blow at the chine. A hoop gave way; another blow enabled him to pry out the head of the cask. He stood blinking at the sight exposed, for the little barrel was full of coins—yellow coins, large and small. O'Reilly seized a handful and held them close to the candle-flame; among the number he noted a Spanish doubloon, such as young Estéban had found.

He tested the weight of the other casks and found them equally heavy. Knowing little about gold, he did not attempt to estimate the value of their contents, but he judged they must represent a fortune. With throbbing pulses he next lifted the lid of the nearest chest. Within, he discovered several compartments, each stored with neatly wrapped and labeled packages of varying shapes and sizes. The writing upon the tags was almost illegible, but the first article which O'Reilly unwrapped proved to be a goblet of most beautiful workmanship. Time had long since blackened it to the appearance of pewter or some base metal, but he saw that it was of solid silver. Evidently he had uncovered a store of old Spanish plate.

In one corner of the chest he saw a metal box of the sort in which valuable papers are kept, and after some effort he managed to break it open. Turning back the lid, he found first a bundle of documents bearing imposing scrolls and heavy seals. Despite the dampness, they were in fairly good condition, and there was enough left of the writing to identify them beyond all question as the missing deeds of patent to the Varona lands—those crown grants for which Doña Isabel had searched so fruitlessly. But this was not all that the smaller box contained. Beneath the papers there were numerous leather bags. These had rotted; they came apart

easily in O'Reilly's fingers, displaying a miscellaneous assortment of unset gems—some of them at first sight looked like drops of blood, others like drops of purest water. They were the rubies and the diamonds which had brought Isabel to her death.

O'Reilly waited to see no more. Candle in hand, he crept out into the well to apprise Rosa of the truth.

"We've got it! There's gold by the barrel and the deeds to your land. Yes, and the jewels, too—a quart of them, I guess. I—I can't believe my eyes." He showed her a handful of coins. "Look at that! Doubloons, eagles! There appear to be thousands of them. Why, you're the richest girl in Cuba. Rubies, diamonds—yes, and pearls, too, I dare say—" He choked and began to laugh weakly, hysterically.

"I've heard about those pearls," Rosa cried, shrilly. "Pearls from the Caribbean, as large as plums. Isabel used to babble about them in her sleep."

"I found those deeds the first thing. The plantations are yours now, beyond any question."

Rosa drew back from her precarious position, for she had grown limp from weakness and her head was whirling. As she rose to her feet she brushed something, somebody, some flesh-and-blood form which was standing almost over her. Involuntarily she recoiled, toppling upon the very brink of the pit, whereupon a heavy hand reached forth and seized her. She found herself staring upward into a face she had grown to know in her nightmares, a face the mere memory of which was enough to freeze her blood. It was a hideous visage, thick-lipped, flat-featured, black; it was disfigured by a scar from lip to temple and out of it gleamed a pair of eyes distended and ringed with white, like the eyes of a man insane.

For an instant Rosa made no sound and no effort to escape. The apparition robbed her of breath, it paralyzed her in both mind and body. Her first thought was that

she had gone stark mad, but she had felt Cobo's hands upon her once before and after her first frozen moment of amazement she realized that she was in her fullest senses. A shriek sprang to her lips, she tried to fight the man off, but her weak struggle was like the fluttering of a bird. Cobo crushed her down, strangling the half-uttered cry.

Terror may be so intense, so appalling as to be unendurable. In Rosa's case a merciful oblivion overtook her. She felt the world grow black, fall away; felt herself swing dizzily through space.

O'Reilly looked upward, inquiring, sharply, "What's the matter?" He heard a scuffling of feet above him, but received no answer. "Rosa! What frightened you? *Rosa?*" There was a moment of sickening suspense, then he put his shoulder to the timbers he had displaced and, with a violent shove, succeeded in swinging them back into place. Laying hold of the rope, he began to hoist himself upward. He had gone but a little way, however, when, without warning, his support gave way and he fell backward; the rope came pouring down upon him. "ROSA!" he called again in a voice thick from fright. Followed an instant of silence; then he flattened himself against the side of the well and the breath stuck in his throat.

Into the dim circle of radiance above a head was thrust —a head, a pair of wide shoulders, and then two arms. The figure bent closer, and O'Reilly recognized the swarthy features of that man he had seen at the Matanzas railroad station. There could be no doubt of it—it was Cobo.

The men stared at each other silently, and of the two Cobo appeared to be the more intensely agitated. After a moment his gaze fixed itself upon the opening into the treasure-chamber and remained there. As if to make entirely sure of what he had overheard, he stretched

his body farther, supporting it by his outflung arms, then moved his head from side to side for a better view. He seemed to rock over the mouth of the well like a huge, fat, black spider. He was the first to speak.

"Am I dreaming? Or—have you really discovered that treasure?" he queried.

O'Reilly's upturned face was ghastly. He wet his lips. He managed to whisper Rosa's name.

"The riches of the Varonas! Christ! What a find!" Cobo's teeth shone white in the grin of avarice. "Yes, I see now—a cavern in the rock. Well, well! And you are the spirit of Sebastian, chained in the bowels of La Cumbre. Ha! These are the ghosts—" He began to chuckle, but the sound of his malevolent merriment was like the hiccoughing of a drunken man.

"Rosa! What have you done—"

Cobo ran on unheeding: "It must be a great treasure, indeed, from all accounts—the ransom of a dozen kings. That's what Cueto said, 'The ransom of a dozen kings!' Those were his very words."

The fellow continued to sway himself back and forth, peering as if his eyes were about to leave his head. For a long moment or two he utterly disregarded O'Reilly, but finally as he gained more self-control his gaze shifted and his expression altered. He changed his weight to his left arm and with his right hand he drew his revolver.

"What are you doing?" O'Reilly cried, hoarsely.

The colonel seemed vaguely surprised at this question. "Fool! Do you expect me to share it with you?" he inquired.

"Wait! There's enough—for all of us," O'Reilly feebly protested; then, as he heard the click of the cocked weapon: "Let me out. I'll pay you well—make you rich." In desperation he raised his shaking hand to dash out the candle, but even as he did so the colonel spoke, at the same time carefully lowering the revolver hammer.

"You are right. What am I thinking about? There must be no noise. *Caramba!* A pretty business that would be, wouldn't it? With my men running up here to see what it was all about. No, no! No gunshots, no disturbance of any kind. You understand what I mean, eh?"

His face twisted into a grin as he tossed the revolver aside, then undertook to detach a stone from the crumbling curb. "No noise!" he chuckled. "No noise whatever."

O'Reilly, stupefied by the sudden appearance of this monstrous creature, stunned by the certainty of a catastrophe to Rosa, awoke to the fact that this man intended to brain him where he stood. In a panic he cast his eyes about him, thinking to take shelter in the treasure-cave, but that retreat was closed to him, for he had wedged the wooden timbers together at the first alarm. He was like a rat in a pit, utterly at the mercy of this maniac. And Cobo was a maniac at the moment; he had so far lost control of himself as to allow the stone to slip out of his grasp. It fell with a thud at O'Reilly's feet, causing the assassin to laugh once more.

"Ho, ho!" he hiccoughed. "My fingers are clumsy, eh? But there is no need for haste." He stretched out his arm again, laid hold of another missile, and strained to loosen it from its bed. "Jewels! Pearls the size of plums! And I a poor man! I can't believe it yet." He could not detach the stone, so he fumbled farther along the curbing. "Pearls, indeed! I would send a dozen men to hell for one—"

O'Reilly had been standing petrified, his body forced tightly against the rough surface behind him, following with strained fascination the deliberate movements of the man above him; now he saw Cobo, without the least apparent reason, twist and shudder, saw him stiffen rigidly as if seized with a sudden cramp, saw his eyes

dilate and heard him heave a deep, whistling sigh. O'Reilly could not imagine what ailed the fellow. For an eternity, so it seemed, Cobo remained leaning upon his outspread arms, fixed in that same attitude of paralysis—it looked almost as if he had been startled by some sound close by. But manifestly that was not the cause of his hesitation, for his face became convulsed and an expression of blank and utter astonishment was stamped upon it. The men stared fixedly at each other, O'Reilly with his head thrown back, Cobo with his body propped rigidly upon wooden arms and that peculiar shocked inquiry in his glaring eyes. But slowly this expression changed; the colonel bent as if beneath a great weight, his head rose and turned back upon his neck, he filled his lungs with another wheezing sigh. "Christ! O Christ—" he whispered.

His teeth ground together, his head began to wag upon his shoulders; it dropped lower and lower; one hand slipped from its hold and he lurched forward. An instant he hung suspended from the waist; then he appeared to let go limply as all resistance went out of his big body. There came a warning rattle of dirt and mortar and pebbles; the next instant he slipped into the well and plunged headlong down upon O'Reilly, an avalanche of lifeless flesh.

Johnnie shielded himself with his upflung arms, but he was driven to his knees, and when he scrambled to his feet, half stunned, it was to find himself in utter darkness. There was a heavy weight against his legs. With a strength born of horror and revulsion he freed himself; then hearing no sound and feeling no movement, he fumbled for the candle and with clumsy fingers managed to relight it. Even after the flame had leaped out and he saw what shared the pit with him he could barely credit his senses. The nature of his deliverance was uncanny, supernatural—it left him dazed. He had beheld death stamped upon Cobo's writhing face even while the fellow

braced himself to keep from falling, but what force had effected the phenomenon, what unseen hand had stricken him, Johnnie was at a loss to comprehend. It seemed a miracle, indeed, until he looked closer. Then he understood. Cobo lay in a formless, boneless heap; he seemed to be all arms and legs; his face was hidden, but between his shoulders there protruded the crude wooden handle of a home-made knife to which a loop of cord was tied.

O'Reilly stared stupidly at the weapon; then he raised his eyes. Peering down at him out of the night was another face, an impertinent, beardless, youthful face.

He uttered Jacket's name, and the boy answered with a smile. "Bring my knife with you when you come," the latter directed.

"*You!*" The American's voice was weak and shaky. "I thought—" He set the candle down and covered his eyes momentarily.

"That's a good knife, all right, and sharp, too. The fellow died in a hurry, eh? Who does he happen to be?"

"Don't you know? It—it's Cobo."

"*Cobo!* Coby, the baby-killer!" Jacket breathed an oath. "Oh, that blessed knife!" The boy craned his small body forward until he was in danger of following his victim. "Now this *is* good luck indeed! And to think that he died just like any other man."

"Rosa! Where is she?" O'Reilly inquired in a new agony of apprehension.

"Oh, she is here," Jacket assured him, carelessly. "I think she has fainted. *Caramba!* Isn't that like a woman —to miss all the fun? But, compadre—that was a blow for Cuba Libre; what? People will talk about me when I'm as dead as that pig. 'Narciso Villar, the slayer of Cobo'—that's what they'll call me." Jacket giggled hysterically. "I—I thought he would jump up and run

after me, so I fled, but he tried to bury himself, didn't he? His flesh was like butter, O'Reilly."

"Help me out, quick! Here, catch this rope." Johnnie managed to fling the coil within reach of his little friend and a moment later he had hoisted himself from that pit of tragedy.

XXVII

MORIN, THE FISHERMAN

WHEN Rosa Varona regained consciousness sufficiently to understand what had happened she proved herself a person of no little self-control. She went to pieces for a moment, as was only natural, but O'Reilly soon succeeded in calming her. Nor did he have to remind her twice that this was no time for weakness or hysteria; it was she, in fact, who first voiced the fear that Cobo dead was scarcely less of a menace than Cobo alive.

"What are we going to do with him?" she inquired.

Jacket, too, appreciated the dangers of the situation. "We must get rid of him quickly," said he, "for his men are close by; he will be missed and there will be a search."

"I don't intend to make him a present of that treasure," O'Reilly said, grimly. "It is our only salvation."

"But how are we going to hide him?" Jacket inquired. "One might as well try to conceal a church; oxen couldn't hoist him out of that hole."

"Precisely! He has made our work easy for us. We can't take more than a small part of the money with us, anyhow; the rest will have to lie here until the war is over. Well! We shall leave Cobo on guard over what remains!"

Jacket was immensely pleased with this idea, once he had grasped it. "What could be better?" he cried. "The man's spirit is evil enough to frighten people away and we will drop stones upon him, so that he can learn the taste of his own medicine. It suits me exactly to think of

Colonel Cobo standing on his head in a hole in the ground for the rest of eternity!"

O'Reilly was by this time suffering the full reaction from the events of the past half-hour and he was nearer exhaustion than he dreamed, but, conquering his repugnance for his unescapable task, he lowered himself once more into the well. His arms were weak, however, and his fingers numb, so he fell rather than slid the length of the rope. He managed to open the door of the treasure-chamber, then entered and loaded his pockets with gold. He sent up the jewel-box at the end of the rope, dragged the body of Cobo into the cave, then wedged the barricade back into place. It required the combined strength of Rosa and Jacket to help him the last few feet of his climb.

"Now fetch stones, rubbish, anything—and throw it in there," he gasped.

The boy and the girl fell to with a will, and after a time Johnnie joined them. Slowly, laboriously, the three of them carried debris from the edge of the quarry and bricks from the ruined house; they scraped up armfuls of leaves and trash—anything, in fact, which would serve to raise the bottom of the shaft and conceal the entrance to their enemy's resting-place. It was slavish work, but O'Reilly kept them at it until they were ready to drop. Daylight overtook them at their task.

They were weak, sick, deadly tired; they could barely shuffle a few yards at a time when they finally reached Asensio's hut; nevertheless there was hope in their hearts, for O'Reilly's ragged clothes sagged with the weight of gold pieces and the little metal box he carried was heavy. Nor were they greatly concerned about the safety of the treasure they had left behind, for the entrance to the cavern lay deeply buried, and Cobo, the guerrilla, stood guard over the chests of plate and the casks of coin.

Evangelina, vastly bewildered at the sight of the coin

which was forced into her palm, went for food and spent most of the day in cooking it. The treasure-hunters alternately slept and ate. It was not until well along toward evening that Rosa and O'Reilly felt any desire to take stock of the contents of that jewel-box, but finally, with heads together and with backs to the door of the *bohio*, they made a furtive examination. It was a task that held them spellbound, for there were loose gems of many varieties, some well, some badly cut; there were pieces of antique Spanish jewelry, valuable mainly by virtue of their antiquity, clumsy settings of silver and gold containing dead, uninteresting stones; others of the finest and most delicate workmanship. Some of the pieces were like glittering cobwebs enmeshing sparks of fire and drops of blood. They found emeralds and sapphires the value of which they did not attempt to estimate; and, besides these, a miscellaneous assortment of semi-precious stones. There was a fine collection of opals of every size and color, among which were a number of huge flat black ones, indescribably gorgeous with their ever-changing peacock hues. But finest of all the lot were the pearls. Where old Don Estéban had secured these latter was a mystery, for he had not been a widely traveled man. They were splendid, unrivaled in size and luster. Some had the iridescence of soap-bubbles, others ranged from pink to deepest chocolate in color. To touch them was like sacrilege.

O'Reilly realized vaguely that he held in his lap a fortune greater than his wildest dreams had ever compassed. These were the jewels of a rajah. It seemed incredible that this ragged girl beside him was a regal heiress, the possessor of a treasure such as kings might envy. After a time he realized that the mere possession of these gems constituted a new and overwhelming menace.

All that evening he and Rosa cowered in the darkness, whispering furtively, their nerves on edge, their senses

strained. It seemed to them that new and unsuspected perils stalked abroad through the night.

Morning found all hands more nearly rational and feeling the first gnawings of a healthy hunger. Even Asensio confessed to a quite miraculous improvement. While Evangelina prepared breakfast the lovers agreed upon a story to explain the origin of that mysterious gold piece, and later Johnnie warned Jacket for a second time to keep his tongue between his teeth.

"We will have to be doubly careful now," he told the boy. "An unguarded word or an incautious move would be the end of us."

Jacket nodded his complete comprehension. "Sure! All Spaniards are robbers and they'd kill us for a peso. Yes, and the pacificos are no better. I tell you we need to get out of this place."

"I intend to arrange it at once, but—the sight of those jewels has frightened me. If we are searched—if we are even suspected—"

"Oh, Rosa wouldn't have any more use for her pretty trinkets. She'd be in heaven before you could scratch your nose."

O'Reilly frowned. "She isn't at all strong yet. I'm wondering if she can endure the hardships we'll encounter when, or if, we get away."

"Exactly what I was thinking. I've been considering another plan."

"Indeed?" O'Reilly scanned the face of his young friend with interest. He was beginning to have a high regard for Jacket's capabilities, and the boy's exploit of the night before certainly entitled him to be heard upon any subject.

"I told you about my friend at the market," the latter continued. "Well, he is a miserable Spaniard, but he has a son in the manigua."

"One of us?" Johnnie was surprised.

"Yes. The old fellow owns a volandra in which he brings charcoal from the eastward twice a month."

There was a moment of silence; then O'Reilly said, slowly, as if hesitating even to voice such a suggestion, "You mean—he might take us out of here—on his schooner?"

"Who knows? He's not a bad old fellow and he likes me. But there would be no place for women."

"How well does he like you?"

"Oh, we are like two thieves."

After another period of thought O'Reilly said, "Take me to him, and remember I'm your brother Juan."

The Matanzas market did not present a scene of great activity when the two friends slunk into it. It was midday, and what food had earlier been offered for sale had for the most part long since disappeared. All but a few of the stalls were empty, and a number of emaciated *reconcentrados* were searching listlessly among them for neglected scraps, or imploring aid from such marketmen as still lingered about. Like most Spanish markets, the building was far from clean and housed odors unpleasant even to starving people. In the smelliest section, at one of the fish-stalls, Jacket accosted a villainous old brigand in a rough Gallego cap, baggy blouse and trousers, and straw sandals.

"Good day, my Captain," he cried, cheerily.

The Spaniard raised his head, scowled ferociously, then waved a long, thin-bladed knife in menacing fashion.

"Aha! So there you are, robber! Be off now before I slit your greedy little belly!" He spoke in an angry, husky voice. When Jacket stood his ground he reached for him with a hand upon which blood and fish-scales had dried. "Didn't I promise to give you to the soldiers if you came back to bother me?"

Jacket was unabashed by this hostile reception. He grinned broadly and with an impudent eye he scanned the

empty premises. "Where is my little fish?" he demanded. "As I live, I believe you have sold it! God! What a miser! For the sake of another centavo you would see me starve? There's a heart for you!"

"*Your* little fish!" roared the brigand, clashing his blade on the filthy counter. "No shark ever stole so many fish as you. Come, I shall make an end of you, and have some peace. Starve? *You?* Bah! Your body is like a gourd."

"Yes, and quite as hollow. I starve because you possess a heart of stone. One little fish, no longer than your finger. Just one?"

"Not so much as a fin!" cried the man. "Can I feed all the rebels in Matanzas?"

"One little fish," Jacket wheedled, "for the sake of Miguelito, who is bravely fighting in the manigua, to the shame of his miserly old father, fattening on the groans of good patriots like me! Must I remind you again that Miguelito was my brother? That I have robbed my own belly in order to give him food?"

"Liar!"

"It is true."

"You never saw him."

"Miguel Morin? With a scar on his neck? The bravest boy in all the Orient? Ask him about Narciso Villar. Come, give me my fish! Or must I lie down and die before your very eyes to prove my hunger?"

"What a nuisance!" grumbled the marketman. He reached into a basket and flung a mackerel upon the table. "There! I saved it for you, and sent the good women of Matanzas away empty-handed. But it is the very last. Annoy me again and I shall open you with my knife and put salt on you."

"Ah! You *are* my good captain!" Jacket cried in triumph, possessing himself of the prize. "Where would I have been but for you?" Turning to O'Reilly, who had

looked on from a distance at this artificial quarrel, he said, "Captain Morin, this is that brother Juan of whom I have told you."

Morin smiled at Johnnie and extended his dirty palm. "The little fellow can speak the truth when he wishes, it seems. I began to doubt that he had a brother. What a boy, eh?" Leaning closer, he whispered, hoarsely: "It is cheaper to give him a fish than to have him steal a whole basketful. But he is a great liar. Even yet I'm not sure that he knows my Miguelito."

"You have a son with the Insurrectos?"

"Yes." The fisherman cast a furtive glance over his shoulder. "He is a traitor of the worst sort, and I don't approve of him, but he's a brave boy and he loves fighting. Sometimes I get hungry to see him."

"Why don't you go and fight by his side?" Jacket demanded.

"God forbid!" Morin flung up his hands. "I'm a loyal subject."

"Well, we are going back to fight. We are going to escape and join Gomez once more!" Jacket made the announcement calmly.

"'*S-sh!* What talk!" Morin was in a nervous panic lest they be overheard. "As if anybody could escape from Matanzas! What made you come here if you are so eager to fight?"

"I'll tell you." O'Reilly assumed direction of the conversation. "There are three of us brothers, we two and Estéban, a pretty little fellow. He was captured by Cobo's men and driven in, and we came to find him."

"You came *here*—here to Matanzas?" Old Morin was incredulous. He muttered an oath. "That was a very nice thing to do. And did you find him?"

"Oh yes! That was easy enough, for the lad is deformed."

"*Tse! Tse!* What a pity!"

"But he is sick—dying—"

"Of course. They're all dying—the poor people! It is terrible."

"We—" O'Reilly faltered slightly, so much hung upon the manner in which Morin would take what he was about to say. "We want to get him out of here—we *must* do so, or we'll lose him."

Sensing some hidden significance, some obscure purpose behind this confession, the Spaniard looked sharply at the speaker. His leathery countenance darkened.

"Why are you telling me this?" he inquired. "What makes you think I won't betray you?"

"Something tells me you won't. You have a good heart, and you have kept Narciso from starving, for the sake of your own boy."

"Well?"

"Will you help us?"

"*I?* In Heaven's name, how?"

"By taking us away in your charcoal-schooner."

"You're mad!" Morin cast another apprehensive look over his shoulder. "I'm a poor man. All I have is my two boats, the vivero, which brings fish, and the volandra, which sails with charcoal. Do you think I'd forfeit them and my life for strangers?"

"There wouldn't be much risk."

"Indeed? Perhaps I know something about that."

O'Reilly leaned closer. "You say you're a poor man. I will pay you well."

Morin eyed the ragged speaker scornfully; it was plain that he put no faith in such a promise, and so O'Reilly took a piece of gold from his pocket, at sight of which the fisherman started.

"What kind of pacificos are you?" Morin queried. His mouth had fallen open, his eyes protruded.

"I, too, am a poor man, but I'm willing to buy freedom for my little brothers and myself."

"How many coins like that have you?"

"Um-m—more than one; enough to pay you for several cargoes of coal."

"And I have given you fish to eat!" Morin rolled his eyes at Jacket. He pondered the marvel of what he had seen, he muttered something to himself.

"For the sake of Miguelito," Jacket urged. "*Caramba!* What a hard-hearted father begot that boy!"

"Hush!" The fisherman was scowling. To O'Reilly he said, "You do wrong to tempt a poor man."

"My brother Estéban is sick. He is a frail little lad with a crooked back. God will reward you."

"Perhaps! But how much will *you* pay?"

"Ten Spanish sovereigns like this—all that I have."

"No! It is not enough."

O'Reilly took Jacket's hand and turned away. "I'm sorry," said he. "I wish I might offer you more." He had taken several steps before Morin hailed him.

"Come back to-morrow," the fisherman cried, crossly. "We will try to talk like sensible people."

The brothers Villar were back at Morin's fish-stand on the following afternoon and they returned daily thereafter until they at last prevailed over the Spaniard's fears and won his promise of assistance. That much accomplished, they made several cautious purchases, a coat here, a shirt there, a pair of trousers in another place, until they had assembled a complete boy's outfit of clothing.

At first Rosa refused absolutely to desert her two faithful negro friends, and O'Reilly won her consent to consider his plan of escape only after he had put the matter squarely up to Asensio and his wife and after both had refused to enter into it. Asensio declared that he was too sick to be moved, and asserted that he would infinitely prefer to remain where he was, provided he was supplied with sufficient money to cover his needs. Evangelina agreed with him.

Then, and not until then, did Rosa begin her preparations. First she made Evangelina cut her hair, a sacrilege that wrung sighs and tears and loud lamentations from the black woman, after which she altered the suit of boy's clothing to fit her figure, or rather to conceal it.

When at last she put it on for O'Reilly's approval she was very shy, very self-conscious, and so altogether unboylike that he shook his head positively.

"My dear, you'll never do," he told her. "You are altogether too pretty."

"But wait until I put that hideous hump upon my back and stain my face, then you will see how ugly I can look."

"Perhaps," he said, doubtfully. A moment, then his frown lightened. "You give me a thought," said he. "You shall wear the jewels."

"Wear them? How?"

"On your back, in that very hump. It will be the safest possible way to conceal them."

Rosa clapped her hands in delight. "Why, of course! It is the very thing. Wait until I show you."

Profiting by her first moment alone—Evangelina and her husband being still in ignorance of the contents of the treasure-box—Rosa made a bundle out of the jewels and trinkets and fastened it securely inside her coat. After a few experiments she adjusted it to her liking, then called O'Reilly once more. This time he was better satisfied; he was, in truth, surprised at the effect of the disfigurement, and, after putting Rosa through several rehearsals in masculine deportment, he pronounced the disguise as nearly perfect as could be hoped for. An application of Evangelina's stain to darken her face, a few tatters and a liberal application of dirt to the suit, and he declared that Rosa would pass anywhere as a boy.

There came a night when the three of them bade good-by to their black companions and slipped away across the city to that section known as Pueblo Nuevo, then followed

the road along the water-front until they found shelter within the shadows of a rickety structure which had once served as a bath-house. The building stood partially upon piles and under it they crept, knee-deep in the lapping waves. To their left was the illumination of Matanzas; to their right, the lights of the Penas Altas fort; ahead of them, empty and dark save for the riding-lights of a few small coasting-vessels, lay the harbor.

The refugees waited a long time; they were beginning to fear that old Morin's nerve had weakened at the eleventh hour, when they beheld a skiff approaching the shore. It glided closer, entered the shade of the bath-house, then a voice cried:

"*Pset!* You are there?" It was Morin himself.

Hastily the three piled aboard. Morin bent to his oars and the skiff shot out. "You were not observed?" he inquired.

"No."

Morin rowed in silence for a time, then confessed: "This business is not to my liking. There is too much risk. Think of me putting my neck in peril—"

"Ho!" Jacket chuckled. "It is just the sort of thing that I enjoy. If Miguelito was captain of his father's boat we'd been in Cardenas by daybreak."

"When do you sail?" O'Reilly asked.

"At dawn, God permitting. You will have to remain hidden and you mustn't even breathe. I have told my men that you are members of my wife's family—good Spaniards, but I doubt if they will believe it."

"Then you are to be my uncle?" Jacket inquired from his seat in the bow. "*Caramba!* That's more than I can stand! To be considered a Spaniard is bad enough, but to be known as the nephew of an old miser who smells of fish! It is too much!"

Badinage of this sort did not displease the fisherman. "It is not often they board us nowadays," he said, more

hopefully, "but of course one never can tell. Perhaps we will sail out under their very noses."

He brought the skiff alongisde a battered old schooner and his passengers clambered aboard. There was a tiny cabin aft and on it, sheltered from the night dew by a loose fold of the mainsail, were two sleeping men. The new-comers followed Morin down into the evil little cabin, where he warned them in a stertorous whisper:

"Not a sound, mind you. If any one comes aboard, you must shift for yourselves. Creep into the hold and hide. Of course, if we are searched—" He muttered something, then groped his way out on deck, and closed the hatch behind him.

It was inky dark in the cabin; the occupants dared not move about for fear of waking the sailors overhead. Time passed slowly. After a while Jacket yawned and sighed and grumbled under his breath. Finally he stretched himself out upon a narrow board bench and fell asleep. O'Reilly drew Rosa to him and she snuggled comfortably into his embrace, resting her head upon his shoulder. It was their first real moment alone.

Now that they had actually embarked upon this enterprise and the girl had given herself entirely into his hands, now that an imminent peril encompassed them both, Johnnie felt that Rosa belonged to him more absolutely, more completely, than at any time heretofore, so he held her close. He caressed her gently, he voiced those tender, intimate, foolish thoughts which he had never dared express. This velvet darkness, this utter isolation, seemed to unite them; to feel the girl's heart beating against his own and her breath warm upon his cheek was intensely thrilling. An exquisite ardor inflamed him, and Rosa responded to it. They resisted briefly, prolonging the delights of this moment, then her arms crept about him, her lips met his in absolute surrender.

They began to whisper, cautiously, so as not to disturb

the sleeping boy; they became unconscious of the flight of time. Rosa lay relaxed against her lover's shoulder and in halting murmurs, interrupted many times by caresses, she told O'Reilly of her need for him, and her utter happiness. It was the fullest hour of their lives.

Sometimes he thought she must be dozing, but he was never sure, for she answered to his lightest touch and awoke to the faintest pressure of his lips. The night wore swiftly on, and it was not long enough for either of them.

With daylight, Morin routed out his men. There was a sleepy muttering, the patter of bare feet upon the deck above, then the creak of blocks as the sails were raised. From forward came the sound of some one splitting wood to kindle the charcoal fire for breakfast. Other sailing-craft seemed to be getting under way, and a fishing-boat, loaded with the night's catch, came to anchor alongside.

The three brothers Villar felt the schooner heel slightly and knew that she was stealing toward the Spanish gunboat which was supposed to be on guard against precisely such undertakings as this. A few moments, then there came a hail which brought their hearts into their throats. Morin himself answered the call.

"Good morning, countryman! Have you caught any of those accursed filibusters since I saw you last? So? Cayo Romano, eh? Well, they come in the night and they go in the night. If I were the pilot of your ship I'd guarantee to put you where they'd fall into your arms, for I know these waters. What have I aboard?" Morin laughed loudly. "You know very well—cannon and shot for the rebels, of course. Will you look? . . . No? . . . Then a cup of coffee perhaps?"

O'Reilly peeped through a dirt-stained cabin window and saw that the volandra was slipping past the stern of the ironclad, so he withdrew his head quickly.

In spite of his hospitable invitation, Captain Morin made no move to come about, but instead held his schooner

on its course, meanwhile exchanging shouts with the unseen speaker. It seemed incredible that Spanish discipline could be so lax, that the schooner would be allowed to depart, even for a coastwise run, without some formalities of clearance, but so it seemed. Evidently the Spaniards had tired of examining these small craft. It was typical of their carelessness.

Of course this was but one danger past and there were many more ahead, for Morin's schooner was liable to be stopped by any of the numerous patrol-boats on duty to the eastward. Nevertheless, when an anxious hour had gone by and she was well out toward the harbor mouth, the refugees told one another they were safe.

Morin shoved back the companionway hatch and thrust a grinning face into view. "Ho, there! my lazy little cousins!" he cried. "Wake up, for I smell Pancho's coffee boiling."

XXVIII

THREE TRAVELERS COME HOME

ESTÉBAN VARONA made slow progress toward recovery. In the weeks following O'Reilly's departure from Cubitas his gain was steady, but beyond a certain point he seemed unable to go. Then he began to lose strength. Norine was the first to realize the truth, but it was some time before she would acknowledge it, even to herself. At last, however, she had to face the fact that Estéban's months of prison fare, the abuse, the neglect he had suffered in Spanish hands, had left him little more than a living corpse. It seemed as if fever had burned him out, or else some dregs of disease still lingered in his system and had all but quenched that elusive spark which for want of a better name we call vitality.

Estéban, too, awoke to the fact that he was losing ground, and his dismay was keen, for a wonderful thing had come into his life and he spent much of his time in delicious contemplative day dreams concerning it, waiting for the hour when he would dare translate those dreams into realities. It seemed to him that he had always loved Norine; certainly she had enshrined herself in his heart long before his mind had regained its clarity, for he had come out of his delirious wanderings with his love full grown. There had been no conscious beginning to it; he had emerged from darkness into dazzling glory, all in an instant. Not until he found himself slipping backward did he attempt to set a guard upon himself, for up to that

hour he had never questioned his right to love. He found his new task heavy, almost too much for him to bear. That he attempted it spoke well for the fellow's strength of character.

The time came finally when he could no longer permit the girl to deceive herself or him with her brave assumption of cheerfulness. Norine had just told him that he was doing famously, but he smiled and shook his weary head.

"Let's be honest," he said. "You know and I know that I can't get well."

Norine was engaged in straightening up the interior of the bark hut in which her patient was installed; she ceased her labors to inquire with lifted brows:

"Tut! Tut! Pray what do you mean by that?"

"There's something desperately wrong with me and I realized it long ago. So did you, but your good heart wouldn't let you—"

Norine crossed quickly to the hammock and laid her cool hand upon the sick man's forehead.

"You mustn't be discouraged," she told him, earnestly. "Remember this is a trying climate and we have nothing to do with. Even the food is wretched."

Estéban's smile became wistful. "That isn't why my fever lasts. If there were any life, any health left in me you would rekindle it. No, there's something desperately wrong, and—we're wasting time."

"You simply *mustn't* talk like this," she cried. Then at the look in his eyes she faltered for the briefest instant. "You'll—undo all that we've done. Oh, if I had you where I could take proper care of you! If we were anywhere but here you d see."

"I—believe you. But unfortunately we are not elsewhere."

"I'm going to take you away," she exclaimed, forcefully.

Estéban stroked her hand softly. "You can't do that,

Miss Evans. You have been wonderful to me and I can't begin to express my gratitude—" Norine stirred, but he retained his grasp of her fingers, gaining courage from the contact to proceed. "I have been trying for a long time to tell you something. Will you listen?"

Norine possessed a dominant personality; she had a knack of tactfully controlling and directing situations, but of a sudden she experienced a panic-stricken flutter and she lost her air of easy confidence.

"Not now," she exclaimed, with a visible lessening of color. "Don't bother to tell me now."

"I've waited too long; I must speak."

Norine was amazed at her own confusion, which was nothing less than girlish; she had actually gone to pieces at threat of something she had long expected to hear.

"I know how tired of this work you have become," the man was saying. "I know you're eager to get back to your own work and your own life."

"Well?"

"You have stayed on here just to nurse me. Isn't that true?"

She nodded somewhat doubtfully.

"Now then, you must stop thinking about me and—make your arrangements to go home."

Norine eyed the speaker queerly. "Is *that* what you have been trying so long to tell me?" she inquired.

"Yes."

"Is that—all?"

There was a moment of silence. "Yes. You see, I know how tired you are of this misery, this poverty, this hopeless struggle. You're not a Cuban and our cause isn't yours. Expeditions come from the United States every now and then and the Government will see that you are put safely aboard the first ship that returns. I'll manage to get well somehow."

Norine's color had returned. She stood over the ham-

mock, looking down mistily. "Don't you need me, want me any more?" she inquired.

Estéban turned his tired eyes away, fearing to betray in them his utter wretchedness. "You have done all there is to do. I want you to go back into your own world and forget—"

A sudden impulse seized the girl. She stopped and gathered the sick man into her young, strong arms. "Don't be silly," she cried. "My world is your world, Estéban dear. I'll never, never leave you."

"Miss Evans! *Norine!*" Varona tried feebly to free himself. "You mustn't—"

Norine was laughing through her tears. "If you won't speak, I suppose I must, but it is very embarrassing. Don't you suppose I know exactly how much you love me? Why, you've told me a thousand times—"

"Please! *Please!*" he cried in a shaking voice. "This is wrong. I won't let you—you, a girl with everything—"

"Hush!" She drew him closer. "You're going to tell me that you have nothing, can offer me nothing. You're going to do the generous, noble thing. Well! I hate generous people. I'm selfish, utterly selfish and spoiled, and I don't propose to be robbed of anything I want, least of all my happiness. You do love me, don't you?"

Estéban's cry was eloquent; he clasped his arms about her and she held him fiercely to her breast.

"Well, then, why don't you tell me so? I—I can't keep on proposing. It isn't ladylike."

"We're quite mad, quite insane," he told her after a while. "This only makes it harder to give you up."

"You're not going to give me up and you're not going to die. I sha'n't let you. Think what you have to live for."

"I—did wrong to surrender."

"It was I who surrendered. Come! Must I say it all? Aren't you going to ask me—"

"What?"

"Why, to marry you, of course."

Estéban gasped; he looked deeply into Norine's eyes, then he closed his own. He shook his head. "Not that," he whispered. "Oh, not that!"

"We're going to be married, and I'm going to take you out of this miserable place."

"What happiness!" he murmured. "If I were well—But I won't let you marry a dying man."

Norine rose, her face aglow with new strength, new determination. She dried her eyes and readjusted her hair with deft, unconscious touch, smiling down, meanwhile, at the man. "I brought you back when you were all but gone. I saved you after the others had given you up, and now you are mine to do with as I please. You belong to me and I sha'n't consult you—" She turned, for a figure had darkened the door; it was one of her English-speaking convalescents who was acting as a sort of orderly.

"Señorita," the man said, with a flash of white teeth, "we have another sick man, and you'd never guess who. It is that American, El Demonio—"

"Mr. Branch?"

"Si! The very same. He has just come from the front."

"Is he sick or wounded?" Estéban inquired.

"Shot, by a Spanish bullet. He asked at once for our señorita."

"Of course. I'll come in an instant." When the messenger had gone Norine bent and pressed her lips to Estéban's. "Remember, you're mine to do with as I please," she said; then she fled down the grassy street.

Branch was waiting at Norine's quarters, a soiled figure of dejection. His left arm lay in a sling across his breast. He looked up at her approach, but she scarcely recognized him, so greatly changed was he.

Leslie had filled out. There was a healthy color be-

neath his deep tan, his flesh was firm, his eyes clear and bright.

"Hello, Norine!" he cried. "Well, they got me."

Norine paused in astonishment. "Why, *Leslie!* I was so frightened! But—you can't be badly hurt."

"Bad enough so that Lopez sent me in. A fellow gets flyblown if he stays in the field, so I beat it."

"Has your arm been dressed?"

"No. I wouldn't let these rough-and-tumble doctors touch it. They'd amputate at the shoulder for a hangnail. I don't trust 'em."

"Then I'll look at it."

But Leslie shrugged. "Oh, it's feeling fine, right now! I'd rather leave it alone. I just wanted to see you—"

"You mustn't neglect it; there's danger of—"

"Gee! You're looking great," he interrupted. "It's better than a banquet just to look at you."

"And *you!*" Norine scanned the invalid appraisingly. "Why, you're another man!"

"Sure! Listen to this." He thumped his chest. "Best pair of bellows in Cuba. The open air did it."

"What a pity you were hurt just at such a time. But you would take insane risks. Now then, let's have a look at your wound." She pushed him, protesting, into her cabin.

"It doesn't hurt, really," he declared. "It's only a scratch."

"Of course you'd say so. Sit down."

"Please don't bother. If you don't mind—"

"But I do mind. If you won't trust me I'll run for a doctor."

"I tell you I can't stand 'em. They'll probe around and give a fellow gangrene."

"Then behave yourself." Norine forced the patient into a chair and withdrew his arm from the sling. Then, despite his weak resistance, she deftly removed the ban-

dage. From his expression she felt sure that she must be hurting him, but when the injury was exposed she looked up in wonderment.

"Leslie!" she exclaimed. "What in the world—"

"Well! You insisted on seeing it," he grumbled. "I told you it wasn't much." He tried to meet her eyes, but failed.

There was a moment's pause, then Norine inquired, curiously: "What is the trouble? You'd better 'fess up."

Branch struggled with himself, he swallowed hard, then said: "I'm—going to. You can see now why I didn't go to a doctor: *I* did it—shot myself. You won't give me away?"

"Why—I don't understand."

"Oh, I'm in trouble. I simply had to get away, and this was all I could think of. I wanted to blow a real hole through myself and I tried three times. But I missed myself."

"Missed yourself? How? Why?"

Branch wiped the sweat from his face. "I flinched—shut my eyes and pulled the trigger."

Norine seated herself weakly; she stared in bewilderment at the unhappy speaker. "Afraid? You, El Demonio! Why, you aren't afraid of anything!"

"Say! You don't believe all that stuff, do you? I'm afraid of my shadow and always have been. I'm not brave and never was. They told me I was going to die and it scared me so that I tried to end things quickly. I couldn't bear to die slowly, to *know* that I was dying by inches. But, Lord! It scared me even worse to go into battle. I was blind with fright all the time and I never got over it. Why, the sight of a gun gives me a chill, and I jump every time one goes off. God! how I've suffered! I went crazy at our first engagement—crazy with fear. I didn't know where I was, or what happened, or anything. Afterward, when they hailed me as a hero, I

thought they were kidding, that everybody must know how frightened I was. After a time I saw that I'd fooled them, and that shamed me. Then—I had to keep it up or become ridiculous. But it nearly killed me."

"If you're speaking the truth, I'm not sure you're such a coward as you make out," Norine said.

"Oh yes, I am. Wait! Before I knew it I had a reputation. Then I had to live up to it." The speaker groaned. "It wasn't so bad as long as I felt sure I was going to die, anyhow, but when I discovered I was getting well—" Branch raised a pair of tragic eyes, his tone changed. "I'll tell you what cured me. I *scared* myself well! Those bugs in my lungs died from suffocation, for I never breathed as long as there was a Spaniard in the same county with me. One day I found that I couldn't cough if I tried. I got strong. I slept well. And *eat?* Huh! I gobbled my share of food and whined for more. I stole what belonged to the others. I began to enjoy myself—to have fun. Life opened up nice and rosy. I fell in love with my new self and the joy of living. Then I didn't want to die—never had, you understand, except to cheat the bugs; it gave me the horrors to think of the chances I'd taken. To be strong, to be healthy and free from pain, to tear my food like a wild animal, and to enjoy hard work was all new and strange and wonderful. I was drunk with it. To think of being cut down, crippled, reduced to the useless, miserable thing I had been, was intolerable. I was twice as scared then as I'd ever been, for I had more to lose. You understand? I forced myself to do the insane things expected of me, when people were looking—natural pride, I suppose—but when they weren't looking, oh, how I dogged it! I crawled on my belly and hid in holes like a snake."

"How—funny!" Norine exclaimed.

"You've got a blamed queer idea of humor," Branch flashed, with a show of his former irritability.

"And so you shot yourself?"

"Yep! I tried to select a good spot where it wouldn't hurt or prove too inconvenient, but—there isn't a place to spare on a fellow's whole body. He needs every inch of himself every minute. I was going to shoot myself in the foot, but my feet are full of bones and I saw myself on crutches the rest of my life."

"Why didn't you resign from the service? You didn't regularly enlist and you've surely earned your discharge."

Branch nodded. "I thought of that, but I've gained a reputation that I don't deserve and, strangely enough, I'm madly jealous of it. I thought if I were really shot by a regular bullet I'd be mourned as a hero and have a chance to walk out with colors flying. I want to tell my children, if I ever have any, what a glorious man I was and how I helped to free Cuba. Oh, I'd lie like a thief to my own children! Now you see why I don't want a doctor. There's only one thing I want—and that's—*home*." Leslie heaved a deep sigh. "Gee! I'm homesick."

"So am I," Norine feelingly declared. "I think I understand how you feel and I can't blame you for wanting to live, now that you've learned what a splendid thing life is."

"If O'Reilly had been with me I think I could have managed, somehow, for he would have understood, too. I—I'll never go back to the front, alone—they can shoot me, if they want to. Have you heard anything from him?"

"Not a word. Cuba swallowed him up. Oh, Leslie, it is a cruel country! It is taking the best and the youngest. I—want to go away."

He smiled mirthlessly. "I'm fed up on it, too. I want to be where I can shave when I need to and wear something besides canvas pajamas. I'm cured of war; I want a policeman to stop the traffic and help me across the

street. I want to put my feet under a breakfast-table, rustle a morning paper, and slap an egg in the face. That's all the excitement I hunger for."

Norine filled a basin with clean water and, taking a fresh bandage, wrapped up the self-inflicted hurt, Branch watching her anxiously. Now and again he flinched like a child when she touched his wound. At last he inquired, apprehensively, "Is it infected?"

"No."

"Lord! I'm glad! Wouldn't it be just my luck to get blood poisoning?"

Norine surprised her patient by inquiring, irrelevantly, "Leslie, is there anybody here who can marry people?"

"Eh? Why, of course!" Then suddenly his somber face lightened and he cried: "*Norine! Do you mean it?*"

"Not you. I wouldn't marry you."

"Why not? I'm perfectly well—"

"Please answer me."

Leslie settled back in his chair. "I dare say some of the Cuban Cabinet officers could put up a good bluff at a marriage ceremony."

"A bluff wouldn't do."

"Who's going to be married?"

"I am."

Branch started to his feet once more, his mouth fell open. "You? Nonsense!" When she nodded, his face darkened. "Who is he? Some Cuban, I'll bet—one of these greasers."

"It is poor Estéban."

"'Poor Estéban'! Damn it, they're all poor. That's the very reason he asked you. He's after your money."

"He didn't ask me. I asked him. He's—dying, Leslie." There was a pause. "I'm going to marry him and take him home, where he can get well."

"What will O'Reilly say?"

"I'm afraid we'll never see O'Reilly again. Cuba

frightens me. It has taken him, it will take Estéban, and —that would break my heart."

"Do you love him as much as that?"

Norine raised her eyes and in their depths Branch read her answer. "Well, that ends the rest of us," he sighed. "There's a Minister of Justice here, I believe; he sounds as if he could perform most any kind of a ceremony. We'll find out for sure."

It so happened that the President and well-nigh the entire Provisional Cabinet were in Cubitas. Leslie and Norine went directly to the former. The supreme official was eager to oblige in every way the guest of his Government and her dare-devil countryman, El Demonio. He promptly sent for the Minister of Justice, who in turn gallantly put himself at Norine's disposal. He declared that, although he had never performed the marriage ceremony he would gladly try his hand at it. In no time the news had spread and there was subdued excitement throughout the camp. When Norine left headquarters she was the target of smiles and friendly greetings. Women nodded and chattered at her, ragged soldiers swept her salutes with their *jipi-japa* hats, children clung to her and capered by her side. It was vastly embarrassing, this shameless publicity, but it was touching, too, for there was genuine affection and good-will behind every smile. Norine was between tears and laughter when she ran panting into Estéban's cabin, leaving Branch to wait outside.

At sight of her Estéban uttered a low cry of happiness. "Dearest! I've been lying in a stupor of delight. The world has become bright: I hear people laughing. What a change! And how is El Demonio?"

"He's all right; he's waiting to see you, but first—I've arranged everything! The President and his Cabinet are coming to witness the ceremony."

Estéban poised, petrified, upon his elbow, his face was

a study. "What have you arranged?" he managed to inquire.

"'Sh-h!" Norine laid a finger upon his lips. "The guest of the Republic is to be married to-day. Dignitaries, magistrates, nabobs, are turning out in her honor. They are shaving and borrowing clean shirts for the occasion. The Minister of Justice has a brand-new pair of tan shoes and he has promised to wear them, come rain or shine."

"*Norine!* Oh, my dear—" quavered the sick man. "I can't let you do this mad thing. Think! I'm ready for the grave—"

"This will make you well. We're going away when the very next expedition arrives."

But still Varona protested. "No, no! Who am I? I have nothing to offer, nothing to give. I'm poorer than a peon."

"Thank goodness, I can do all the giving! I've never told you, Estéban, but I'm quite rich." Holding the man away, she smiled into his eyes. "Yes, richer than I have any right to be. I had no need to come to Cuba; it was just the whim of an irresponsible, spoiled young woman. I gave a huge amount of money to the New York Junta and that's why I was allowed to come."

"You're not a—a trained nurse?"

"Oh, dear, no! Except when it amuses me to pretend."

"How strange!" The invalid was dazed, but after a moment he shook his head. "It is hard to say this, but I don't know whether you really love me or whether your great heart has been touched. You have learned my feelings, and perhaps think in this way to make me well. Is that it?"

"No, no! I'm thoroughly selfish and must have what I want. I want you. So don't let's argue about it." Norine tenderly enfolded the weak figure in her arms. "You must, you *shall* get well or—I shall die, too."

"I haven't the strength to refuse," Estéban murmured. "And yet, how can I leave Cuba? What right have I to accept happiness and leave Rosa—"

This was a subject which Norine dreaded, a question to which she knew no answer. She was not in a mood to discuss it, and made no attempt to do so. Instead, she laid the invalid upon his pillow, saying:

"Leslie is waiting to wish you joy and a quick recovery. May I ask him in?"

She stepped to the door, only to behold her late companion making off down the village street in great haste and evident excitement. Surprised, offended, she checked her impulse to call him back. A moment, then she stepped out into the full sunlight and stared after him, for she saw that which explained his desertion. Approaching between the drunken rows of grass huts was a little knot of people. Even as Norine watched it grew into a considerable crowd, for men and women and children came hurrying from their tasks. There were three figures in the lead, a man and two boys, and they walked slowly, ploddingly, as if weary from a long march.

Norine decided that they were not villagers, but ragged *pacificos*, upon the verge of exhaustion. She saw Branch break into a swifter run and heard him shout something, then through eyes suddenly dimmed she watched him fall upon the tallest of the three strangers and embrace him. The crowd grew thicker. It surrounded them.

"Estéban!" Norine cried in a voice she scarcely recognized. She retreated into the doorway with one hand upon her leaping heart. "Estéban! Look! Some one has just arrived. Leslie has gone—" She cleared her vision with a shake of her head and her tongue grew thick with excitement. "They're coming—*here!* Yes! It's —it's *O'Reilly!*"

Young Varona struggled from his hammock. "*Rosa!*" he called, loudly, "*Rosa!*"

IT WAS O'REILLY!

Norine ran and caught him or he would have fallen prone. He pawed and fumbled in a weak attempt to free himself from her restraining arms; a wildness was upon him; he shook as if with palsy. "Did he bring her with him? Is she here? Why don't you answer me? Rosa—" He began to mutter unintelligibly, his vitality flared up, and it was with difficulty that Norine could hold him down. His gaze, fixed upon the square of sunlight framed by the low doorway, was blazing with excitement. To Norine it seemed as if his spirit, in the uncertainty of this moment, was straining to leap forth in an effort to learn his sister's fate.

The crowd was near at hand now. There came the scuffling of feet and murmur of many voices. Estéban fell silent, he closed his hot, bony hands upon Norine's wrists in a painful grip. He bent forward, his soul centered in his tortured eyes.

There came a shadow, then in the doorway the figure of a man, a tattered scarecrow of a man whose feet were bare and whose brown calves were exposed through flapping rags. His breast was naked where thorns had tried to stay him; his beard, even his hair, were matted and unkempt, and the mud of many trails lay caked upon his garments.

It was O'Reilly!

He peered, blinking, into the obscurity, then he turned and drew forward a frail hunchbacked boy whose face was almost a mulatto hue. Hand in hand they stepped into the hut and once again Estéban Varona's soul found outlet in his sister's name. He held out his shaking, hungry arms and the misshapen lad ran into them.

Dumb with amazement, blind with tears, Norine found herself staring upward into O'Reilly's face, and heard him saying:

"I told you I would bring her home."

The next instant she lay upon his breast and sobs of joy were tearing at her.

XXIX

WHAT HAPPENED AT SUNDOWN

THE story of Rosa's rescue came slowly and in fragments, for the news of O'Reilly's return caused a sensation. His recital was interrupted many times. So numerous and so noisy did these diversions become that Norine, fearing for the welfare of her patient, banished O'Reilly's visitors and bore him and Branch off to her own cabin, leaving the brother and sister alone. In the privacy of Norine's quarters O'Reilly finished telling her the more important details of his adventures. He was well-nigh worn out, but his two friends would not respect his weariness; they were half hysterical with joy at his safety, treating him like one returned from the dead; so he rambled disjointedly through his tale. He told them of his hazardous trip westward, of his and Jacket's entrance into Matanzas and of the distressing scenes they witnessed there. When he had finished the account of his dramatic meeting with Rosa his hearers' eyes were wet. The recital of the escape held them breathless.

"As a matter of fact, our get-away was ridiculously easy," he said, "for we had luck at every turn—regular Irish luck. I'm sure Captain Morin suspected that Rosa wasn't a boy, but he was perfectly foolish about Jacket and tolerated us on his account. We owe everything to that kid; he's wonderful. I made Morin independent for life, but it wasn't the money, it was Jacket who induced him to bring us clear to Turiguano. He

landed us one night, this side of the Moron trocha. Since then we've waded swamps to our armpits, we've fought the jungle and chewed bark—but we're here." Johnnie heaved a deep sigh of relief.

"Where did you get the money to hire schooners and corrupt captains?" Branch inquired. "You were broke when I knew you."

O'Reilly hesitated; he lowered his voice to a whisper. "We found the Varona treasure."

Norine uttered a cry. "Not Don Estéban's treasure?"

"Exactly. It was in the well where young Estéban told us it was."

"Oh, Johnnie! You mean thing!" exclaimed the girl. "You promised—"

"You'll have a chance to dig," he laughed. "We couldn't begin to bring all of it; we merely took the jewels and the deeds and what money our clothes would hold. The rest—"

"Wait! *Wait!*" Branch wailed, clapping his hand to his head. "'Merely the jewels and the deeds and what money our clothes would hold?' Bullets! Why, one suit of clothes will hold all the money in the world! Am I dreaming? 'Money!' I haven't seen a bona-fide dollar since I put on long pants. What does money look like? Is it round or—?"

Johnnie produced from his pocket a handful of coins.

Branch's eyes bulged, he touched a gold piece respectfully, weighed it carefully, then pressed it to his lips. He rubbed it against his cheeks and in his hair; he placed it between his teeth and bit it.

"It's *real!*" he cried. "Now let me look at the jewels."

"Rosa has them. She's wearing them on her back. Hunched backs are lucky, you know; hers is worth a fortune."

"Why, this beats the *Arabian Nights!*" Norine gasped.

"It beats—" Branch paused, then wagged his head

warningly at the girl. "I don't believe a word of it and you mustn't. Johnnie read this story on his yachting-trip. It couldn't happen. In the first place there isn't any more money in the world; mints have quit coining it. Why, if I wrote such a yarn—"

"It *is* almost unbelievable," Johnnie acknowledged. "I found Aladdin's cave, but"—his face paled and he stirred uneasily—"it was nearly the death of all of us. I'll have to tell you the whole story now; I've only told you the half."

While his hearers listened, petrified with amazement and doubting their ears, he recited the incidents of that unforgettable night on La Cumbre: how Cobo came, and of the trap he sprung; how Jacket stole upon the assassin while he knelt, and of the blow he struck.

When Johnnie had finished there was a long moment of silence. Then Norine quavered, tremulously: "That boy! That blessed boy!"

Branch murmured, feebly: "Dash water in my face, or you'll lose me. I— You—" He found no words to express his feelings and finally voiced his favorite expletive.

"It's all too weirdly improbable," O'Reilly smiled, "but ask Rosa or Jacket—the boy is bursting to tell some one. He nearly died because he couldn't brag about it to Captain Morin, and there won't be any holding him now. I'm afraid he'll tip off the news about that treasure in spite of all my warnings. Those jewels are a temptation; I won't rest easy until they're safely locked up in some good vault. Now then, I've told you everything, but I'm dying for news. Tell me about yourselves, about Estéban. I expected to find him well. What ails him?"

"Oh, Johnnie!" Norine began. "He's very ill. He isn't getting well." Something in her tone caused O'Reilly to glance at her sharply. Branch nodded and winked significantly, and the girl confessed with a blush:

"Yes! You told me I'd surrender to some poor, broken fellow. I'm very happy and—I'm very sad."

"Hunh! He's far from poor and broken," Leslie corrected; "with a half-interest in a humpful of diamonds and a gold-plated well, according to Baron Munchausen, here. This is the Cuban leap-year, Johnnie; Norine proposed to him and he was too far gone to refuse. You came just in time to interrupt a drum-head marriage."

"Is it true?" When Norine acquiesced, O'Reilly pressed her two hands in his. "I'm glad—so glad."

Tears started to the girl's eyes; her voice broke wretchedly. "Help me, Johnnie! Help me to get him home—"

He patted her reassuringly and she took comfort from his hearty promise.

"Of course I will. We'll take him and Rosa away where they can forget Cuba and all the misery it has caused them. We'll make him well—don't worry. Meanwhile, at this moment Rosa needs food and clothing, and so do I."

As the three friends walked up the street they discovered Jacket holding the center of an interested crowd of his countrymen. It was the boy's moment and he was making the most of it. Swollen with self-importance, he was puffing with relish at a gigantic gift cigar.

"I exaggerate nothing," he was saying, loudly. "O'Reilly will tell you that I killed Cobo, alone and unassisted. The man is gone, he has disappeared, and all Matanzas is mystified. This is the hand that did it; yonder is the weapon, with that butcher's blood still on it. That knife will be preserved in the museum at Habana, along with my statue." Jacket spied his chief witness and called to him. "Tell these good people who killed Cobo. Was it Narciso Villar?"

"It was," O'Reilly smiled. "The fellow is dead."

There was renewed murmuring. The crowd pressed

Jacket closer; they passed the knife from hand to hand. Doubters fell silent; the boy swelled visibly. Bantam-like he strutted before their admiring glances, and when his benefactor had passed safely out of hearing he went on:

"God! What a fight we had! It was like those combats of the gladiators you hear about. The man was brave enough; there's no denying his courage, which was like that of ten men—like that of a fierce bull; but I—I was superb, magnificent. The man bellowed, he roared, he grunted; he charged me, flinging the earth high with his heels, but I was banderillero, picador, and matador in one. I was here, I was there, I was everywhere; so swiftly did I move that no eye could follow me." Jacket illustrated his imaginary movements with agile leaps and bounds. "The terror of his name frightened me, I'll admit, but it lent me a desperate courage, too. I thought of the brave men, the good women, the innocent children he had slain, and I fell upon him from this side, from that side, from the front, from the rear. I pricked him, shouting: 'That for the people of Las Villas! This for the women of the San Juan. And once again for the babies you have killed.'" Jacket carried out his pantomime by prodding with a rigid finger first one, then another of his listeners. "Oh, he went mad, like a bull, indeed, but I was another Rafael Guerra. He shed rivers of blood, the ground grew slippery and the grass became red. He stood rocking in his tracks, finally; his breath was like a hurricane. He was exhausted, he was covered with foam, his limbs were made of lead. It was my moment. 'For all your sins!' I cried, and with that I drove yonder blade through his heart and out between his shoulders, thus! My brothers, his flesh was rotten, and the steel clove it as if it were butter."

Jacket was more than gratified at the effect of his recital, for children screamed, women shuddered, and men turned shocked eyes upon one another. He realized that

with a little further practice and a more diligent attention to detail he could horrify the stoutest-hearted listener, nay, cause hysterical women to swoon. He concluded his account in a studiously careless tone; "O'Reilly came, too late, but he helped me to bury the offal. We flung it head first into an old well and dumped rocks upon it. There it will lie until Cuba is free. That, my friends, was the end of Cobo, exactly as it happened."

O'Reilly saw little of his sweetheart that day, for Norine promptly bore the girl off to her own quarters and there attended to her needs, the most pressing of which was clothing. Norine's wardrobe offered little to choose from, but between them they reduced a nurse's uniform to fit the smaller figure. Meanwhile, with a rapidity and a thoroughness delightful to both of them, the two girls came to know each other.

While O'Reilly was similarly engaged in making himself presentable, he and Branch talked earnestly, with the result that they repaired later to General Gomez.

The general welcomed them; he listened with interest to O'Reilly's story of the rescue, and to the account of conditions in Matanzas. O'Reilly concluded by saying:

"I've done what I came to do, sir, but Miss Varona is badly shaken by all she has been through. She's very nervous and far from well. Estéban, too, isn't recovering."

General Gomez nodded. "Miss Evans declares he must have a change, and we have arranged to send him out of the country. His sister, poor child, should go, too."

"When can they leave?"

"Who knows? Not for some time, certainly. Expeditions are irregular."

"They should go at once," O'Reilly said, positively. "That's why we came to see you. Let us—Branch and me—take all three of them to the United States."

"You, too, El Demonio?" inquired the general.

"Yes, sir; if you please."

"But how? How can you take two women and a sick man—

"We'll manage somehow," O'Reilly declared. "It isn't far across to the Bahama Banks."

"True. That's the route of our underground—our undersea—railroad. As you probably know, there is a venturesome countryman of yours who carries our despatches by that way. He devised the scheme, to keep us in touch with our friends in New York, and he has done us great service. He comes and goes in a small boat, but how or when nobody knows. The Spanish patrols are on the lookout for him, and there's a price on his head, so you won't find it easy or safe to cross. Beware that you are not mistaken for him."

"Do you mean that we may go?" Branch eagerly inquired.

The general hesitated, whereupon O'Reilly spoke up: "For my part, I'll agree to come back if you so desire."

Gomez shook his white head. "No! You came to find and to save your fiancée, and you volunteered to serve with us while you were doing so. We have no desire to keep any man against his will. Some one must escort Miss Evans, who is our guest. Why not you two? She has every confidence in you, and if she chooses to risk this enterprise rather than wait until we can guarantee her an easier trip we shall not restrain her. I shall see that you reach the coast safe and sound; beyond that you must trust in God."

Branch was immensely relieved; he joined volubly in O'Reilly's thanks and became careless of his arm, which no longer appeared to pain him. Peace with honor, it seemed, was all that he desired.

"I was looking forward to an interesting ceremony this afternoon," Gomez went on. "Has your arrival changed the plans?"

"Oh no, sir!" O'Reilly said, quickly. "I'd like to make it doubly interesting, if Miss Varona will consent to such short notice."

"Bravo! You have a way of doing the unexpected. Twin births, a double wedding! Why not? The sight of a little happiness will be good for all of us; we're apt to forget that life and the big world are going on as usual. I don't think Miss Varona will have it in her heart to refuse you anything."

The old soldier was right. Rosa did not gainsay her lover, and toward sundown the city among the leaves witnessed an unaccustomed scene.

The women of the camp, delighted at an opportunity of serving Norine, had transformed Estéban's poor quarters into a tiny bower of wild blossoms and green leaves; they likewise gathered flowers for the two brides-to-be, then joined with nimble fingers in adorning their costumes. When the girls came down the street, hand in hand, they received an ovation from men and women alike. Norine was pleased; she smiled and blushed and ran the gantlet bravely enough. But Rosa, sadly overwrought by the day's excitement, was upon the verge of a collapse. Nevertheless she was happy; her eyes were shining, her face was transfigured, her hand, when she took O'Reilly's, was cold and tremulous, but it warmed and grew steady under his grasp.

Many people—all Cubitas, in fact—had assembled to witness the romantic double wedding, but few actually succeeded, for Estéban's hut was too small to accommodate more than the highest officials of the Provisional Government, so the others were forced to wait outside in the gathering dusk. And those Ministers, those secretaries of departments, those generals and colonels, what a motley crowd they formed! There was scarcely a whole garment among them. They were sunburnt, wind-browned, earnest men, the old ones grayed and

grizzled from worry, the younger ones wasted from hardships in the field. But out of their rags and poverty shone a stately courtesy and consideration. They were gentlemen, men of culture and refinement, the best and oldest blood of Cuba. Both Norine and Johnnie had earned their gratitude, and the story of the Varona twins was typical of the island, nowadays, so they unbent and there were warm congratulaitons, well-turned Latin pleasantries, elaborate compliments upon the beauty of the brides.

Then, afterward, there was a surprise—a genuine surprise—in the form of a banquet at the big mess shelter, with an orchestra concealed behind a screen of fresh-cut palm-leaves stuck into the soft earth. This was the men's part of the celebration, the official compliment to Cuba's guest. It was a poorly furnished banquet, with a service of tin and granite ware and chipped china, and there was little to eat, but the true spirit of festivity was present. The Lone Star emblem of the new Republic was draped with the Stars and Stripes, and there were many speeches.

Norine's protests at leaving Estéban went unheeded, and Leslie Branch escorted her in place of the bridegroom, who lay blissfully dreaming in his hammock. Her amazement passed all bounds when, from the hidden recess behind the palm-leaves, came not the music of mandolins and guitars, but the strains of a balanced orchestra under the leadership of Cuba's most eminent bandmaster. Whence the players had come, where they had found their instruments, was a mystery, but they played well, divinely, so it seemed to the music-hungry diners.

Such a banquet as that was! Some one had contributed a demijohn of wine, and there was coffee, too, at the last, made from the berries of some jungle plant. The chef, once famous at the Inglaterra, was forced to appear and take homage for this final triumph.

Rosa, very dainty in her borrowed nurse's uniform, was round-eyed, timid; she evoked much admiration, but when she was addressed as Señora O'Reilly she blushed to the roots of her hair and shrank close to her husband's side. To feel herself secure, to see on all sides friendly faces, to know that these fine men and women—there were numerous good Cuban matrons present—were her own people and meant her well, was almost unbelievable. She had so long been hidden, she had so long feared every stranger's glance, it was not strange that she felt ill at ease, and that the banquet was a grave ordeal for her.

Branch proved to be a happy choice as Estéban's proxy, for he relieved Norine's anxiety and smothered her apprehensions. When called upon to speak he made a hit by honestly expressing his relief at escaping the further hazards of this war. Prompted by some freakish perversity, and perhaps unduly stimulated by the wine he had drunk, he made open confession of his amazing cowardice.

O'Reilly interpreted for him and well-nigh every sentence evoked laughter. El Demonio's heroic reputation had preceded him, therefore his unsmiling effort to ridicule himself struck the audience as a new and excruciatingly funny phase of his eccentricity. Encountering this blank wall of disbelief, Branch waxed more earnest, more convincing; in melancholy detail he described his arrant timidity, his cringing fear of pain, his abhorrence of blood and steel. His elongated face was genuinely solemn, his voice trembled, his brow grew damp with unpleasant memories; he seemed bent upon clearing his conscience once for all. But he succeeded only in convulsing his hearers. Women giggled, men wiped tears from their eyes and declared he was a consummate actor and the rarest, the most fantastic humorist they had ever listened to. They swore that Cuba had lost, in him, a peerless champion. When he had finished they cheered him

loudly and the orchestra broke into a rousing military march.

Leslie turned to voice his irritation and surprise to Norine, but she had slipped away, so he glared at O'Reilly, wondering how the latter had so artfully managed to mistranslate his remarks.

When Rosa and O'Reilly returned to Estéban's cabin they found Norine ahead of them. She was kneeling beside the sick man's hammock, and through the doorway came the low, intimate murmur of their voices. Rosa drew her husband away, whispering, happily:

"He will get well. God and that wonderful girl won't let him die."

XXX

THE OWL AND THE PUSSY-CAT

THE journey to the coast was made by easy stages and Estéban stood it fairly well. The excitement wore upon him, to be sure, and the jolting of his litter was trying, but Norine was always at his side where he could see her, and Rosa joined in the tender care of him. Guides, horses, and a tent for the sick man had been supplied, and over these O'Reilly exercised a jealous watchfulness, ably seconded by Branch. For once, at least, the latter lent himself to useful ends and shirked no duties. His wounded arm recovered miraculously and he exercised it freely; he skirmished industriously for food and he enlivened the journey by a rare display of good spirits.

Jacket, of course, went along. Upon the announcement of O'Reilly's intended departure for the States he had promptly abandoned Cuba to her fate. He foreswore her utterly and declared himself a loyal American citizen. He made it plain once more, and for the last time, that where O'Reilly went, there went he, for they were one and indivisible. It dismayed him not at all to turn his feet to new pathways, his face toward new adventures.

Relying upon the best information obtainable at Cubitas, O'Reilly had counted upon securing a sailboat from a certain fisherman whose sympathies were known to be loyal, but in this he was disappointed. The party arrived at its destination, a tiny clearing on an unfrequented part of the north shore, only to find it deserted and already grown to weeds. The house was empty, the boats were

gone—all but one old hulk, too rotten to warrant moving, which lay high up on the sand, its planks worm-eaten, its seams wide spread by the sun.

Having established Estéban in the hut, O'Reilly took counsel with his Cubans, but gained little satisfaction from them. They knew of no other fisherman in this vicinity; the nearest towns were in Spanish hands; they advised a return to Cubitas at once. This O'Reilly would not listen to. Sending them in one direction, he took Leslie and Jacket and rode away in the other. The trio followed the beach for several miles until they came to a vast mangrove swamp which turned them inland. This they skirted until the jungle became impassable and they were in danger of losing themselves; they returned at dusk, having encountered no human being and having discovered neither roads nor houses.

The other expedition reported slightly better successes; it had located a small plantation some distance to the east, the owner of which had warned them against exploring farther, inasmuch as a strong Spanish patrol, on the lookout for that American despatch-bearer from Nassau, was operating in his neighborhood. It was these very troops, he announced, who had driven the fisherman from his home; he was sure there were no boats anywhere within reach.

O'Reilly was in a quandary. He gravely doubted Estéban's ability to stand the rough return journey, and when he spoke to Norine of turning back she was panic-stricken at the suggestion.

"No, no!" she cried, anxiously. "We *must* get him away. Oh, Johnnie, every day we lose by waiting lessens his chances! His heart is set on going through and it would—kill him to go back."

"Then I guess we'll have to go through," he smiled.

For the first time in their acquaintance Norine lost control of herself.

"We simply *must* find a boat. All he needs is proper care, proper food, and medical attention. Here we can get nothing. Why, the disappointment alone—" Her voice failed her, tears started to her eyes, and she began to tremble wretchedly. "If he— If I—lose him I'll die, too," she sobbed.

O'Reilly tried to comfort her and she bowed her head upon his shoulder.

"Promise that you won't go back," she implored him.

"Very well, if you'll consent to risk this miserable tub we found on the beach—"

"I'll risk anything—a raft, even."

"It is large enough to carry us if we can manage to make it hold water, but it won't be safe. The weather is good at this season and it shouldn't take us long to run across to Andros if we have luck. If we don't have luck—"

Norine dried her eyes. "What would you do if you were alone? Would you dare try it?"

He hesitated, then confessed, "I think I would, but—"

"Is there an even chance of our getting across?"

"Perhaps. It all depends upon the weather."

"Can't we—build a boat?"

He shook his head. "Even if we had lumber and tools it would take too long. Ten miles to the east there are Spaniards. We must do one thing or the other quickly, before they learn we're here."

"Then let's go on. I'm sure Rosa will agree."

Rosa did agree. When her husband put the question fairly to her she showed by the pallor of her cheeks and by the rekindling light of terror in her eyes how desperately she feared remaining longer in this land of hate and persecution. "Don't turn back," she cried. "I'm not the girl I was. I've endured so much here that—I'm always in fear. Anything would be better than going back."

When morning came O'Reilly made a closer examination of the abandoned boat. The result was not encouraging, and when he told Leslie of his intention to make use of it the latter stared at him in open amazement.

"Why, we'll all be drowned!" Branch declared.

"You can return to Cubitas if you wish."

"Yes, and fight some more! No, thank you! I've got a hunch that I'll be killed by the very next gun I see."

"Then you'd better risk the sharks."

Jacket, who was conducting an independent examination of the craft, made an encouraging report. "Ho! I'd go 'round the world in this boat," said he. "She's rotten, and you can stick your finger through her, but fish have no fingers. When the water comes in we'll dip it out."

"Do you want to go with us?" Johnnie eyed the newspaper man curiously.

"I— Y-yes!" Branch gasped. "I'll go, but it's a shame to lose all of Rosa's diamonds."

O'Reilly and one of the guides rode away to the farmhouse discovered on the previous afternoon, and returned in a few hours with all the tools they could find, together with a bucket of tar and a coil of galvanized wire. Then work began.

The wire, cut into short pieces, served as nails and staples with which to draw together the gaping seams. Old rags from the house and parts of the men's clothing supplied calking, upon which the tar was smeared. While one man shaped mast and oars, another cut Estéban's shelter tent into a sail, and fitted it. A stiff, sun-dried cowhide was wet, then stretched and nailed to the gunwales at the bow, forming a sort of forward deck to shelter the sick man from the sun and rain. Jacket climbed the near-by cocoa-palms and threw down a plentiful supply of nuts for food and water on the voyage.

With so many hands the work went fast, and late that

evening the crazy craft was launched. It was necessary to handle her gingerly, and when she took the water she leaked abominably. But during the night she swelled and in the morning it was possible to bail her out.

O'Reilly had to acknowledge himself but poorly pleased with the boat. Branch called her a coffin and declared it was suicide to venture to sea in her, an opinion shared by the Cubans, but the girls were enchanted. To them this fragile bark looked stout and worthy; they were in a fever to be gone.

On the second afternoon the trade-wind died to a gentle zephyr, so the cocoanuts and other food were quickly put aboard, a bed of bows was rigged beneath the rawhide forecastle and Estéban was laid upon it. Then adieux were said and a start was made.

From the point of leaving it was perhaps five miles across the sound to the fringe of keys which in this neighborhood bordered the old Bahama Channel with its unplumbed depths of blue water. Here it was calm, so the run was soon made. The boat handled well enough, all things considered; nevertheless, to O'Reilly, her navigator, it was an anxious hour. Not only was he forced to keep a sharp lookout for blockading gunboats, but he feared he was doing wrong in committing his precious freight to the uncertainties of the Atlantic. Even had he been alone, with a crew of able sailors under him, this voyage would have daunted him, for it was without doubt the wildest adventure in which he had ever participated. When he hinted at these fears and put the matter before his companions for a final test, Branch refused to speak, but Estéban and the girls were earnestly in favor of pushing on. Jacket, of course, loudly seconded them.

At sunset they entered a pass and ran between low mangrove banks. The tide was ebbing and it hurried them through and out into the open sea, where they felt the lift of the mighty ocean swell. Over these slow un-

dulations the sailboat plowed, heading toward the empty northern horizon, with the kindling Pole Star as a beacon. The sky was clear, the sea was gently roughened by the night breeze, the constellations grew bright and appeared to hang low.

When the coast-line of Cuba had become a blur astern Rosa crept back and seated herself beside her husband.

"I breathe freely for the first time since that day when Don Mario came to offer me marriage," she told him. "The past is beginning to seem like a bad, bad dream and I feel a great hope, a great gladness. I am reborn, O'Rail-ye."

"A few hours more and we can all breathe easy." He smiled down at her. She laid her small palm over his fingers which grasped the steering-oar, whereupon he cried with pretended sternness: "Avast there! Don't distract the attention of the skipper or he'll sail his boat in circles. Look out or he'll send you below."

Rosa persisted mutinously, so he punished her with a kiss planted fairly upon her pouting lips, whereupon she nestled closer to him. "How much I love you," she whispered. "But I never can tell you, for we are never alone. Was there ever such a courtship, such a marriage, and such a wedding journey as ours?"

"We're the owl and the pussy-cat who went to sea in a beautiful pea-green boat, 'With plenty of honey and lots of money, wrapped up in a ten-pound note.' Some day when we've settled down in our Harlem flat, and I'm working hard, we'll look back on this and consider it romantic, thrilling. Maybe we'll long for excitement."

"Not I," Rosa shivered. "To be safe, to have you all to myself where I can spoil you, that will be excitement enough."

"We'll rent that little apartment I looked at, or one just like it."

"But, O'Rail-ye, we're rich."

"I—I'd forgotten that. Then let's pretend to be poor. Think how our neighbors would talk about that pretty Mrs. O'Reilly on the fourth floor, and her magnificent jewels. They'd swear I was a smuggler."

As the evening lengthened and the boat forged steadily ahead the two sat murmuring happily. Forward, another bride and groom were similarly engaged. Branch and Jacket took turns bailing.

It proved to be a long, long night, for the boat, though roomy, was uncomfortable. O'Reilly steered as straight a course as he could without compass, but toward morning he saw that the sky was growing overcast and his apprehensions stirred anew. Daylight brought an increased breeze which heeled the boat further. She made better speed, but she likewise took more water through her seams and it became necessary to lend Leslie and Jacket a hand with the bailing. The deep channel was far behind now, and they were on the shallow Bahama Banks; beneath them they could glimpse beds of sponges, patches of coral, white bottom with occasional forests of brilliant-hued sea fans. The horizon still remained vacant and the tip of Andros lay far to the north.

Fortunately the haze was not thick enough to wholly obscure the sun and so O'Reilly was enabled to hold his course. But he did not like the look of things.

By ten o'clock the sea was tumbling and the worm-eaten hulk was laboring. It became necessary to shorten sail. Soon the bottom of the boat was awash and Estéban lay in a pool of brine. Even when the girls helped to dip it out they could not lower its level. The wind freshened steadily; all hands worked desperately, wet to the skin.

In time there came a spiteful drizzle which completely hid the sun and left no indication of the course except the direction whence drove the rain.

No one spoke now. Even Estéban lay silent, shivering miserably upon his sodden bed. In obedience to O'Reilly's

command Jacket flung overboard all but a half-dozen of the remaining cocoanuts. Rosa finally straightened her aching back and smiled at her husband.

"Are we going down?" she asked.

"Oh no! This is merely a squall," he told her, with an assumption of confidence he was far from feeling.

Johnnie tried to reason himself into a more hopeful frame of mind. He assured himself that he and his companions had survived too many perils to become the prey of an idle breeze like this; he argued that no fate could be so cruel as to cheat them when they were so close to safety. But this manful effort brought him little comfort in the face of the chilling rain and with the whitecaps curling higher.

Deliverance came suddenly, and from the least-expected quarter. Out of the mist to starboard there materialized a shape, a schooner driving ahead of the wind. The refugees descried her simultaneously and stood ankle deep in the wash, waving their hats and their calabashes, and shouting crazily until she saw them and fetched up.

Intense thanksgiving, a melting relief, robbed O'Reilly of half his strength; his hands were shaking, his muscles weak; he could barely bring his craft alongside. He saw black faces staring down, he heard cries of amazement and surprised inquiries, then a heaving-line came aboard and the leaky tub was drawn close.

There was a babble of voices, shouted questions, hysterical answers. Rosa was weeping softly; Norine had lifted Estéban and now clutched him tight, while her tears fell upon his face.

The schooner was a sponger bound for Nassau; its blackbird crew spoke English and they willingly helped the strangers overside, laughing and shouting in a child-like display of excitement. How firm, how grateful was the feel of that stout deck! How safe the schooner's measured roll! O'Reilly's knees gave way, he clutched

with strained and aching fingers at the rigging to support himself, leaving Branch and Jacket to tell the surprising story of their presence here. Soon there was hot food and coffee, dry beds and blankets for those who needed them.

Johnnie tucked his bride snugly into one of the hard berths, then stooped and kissed her. Rosa's teeth were chattering, but she smiled happily.

"God's hand directed us," she said. "One only needs to pray long enough and strong enough and He will hear."

It was a month later. Quaint old Nassau lay dozing under an afternoon sun. Its wide shell streets, its low houses, the beach against which it crowded, were dazzling white, as if the town had been washed clean, then spread out to bleach. Upon the horizon lay tumbled, foamy cloud masses, like froth blown thither from the scene of the cleansing. A breeze caused the surface of the harbor to dance and dimple merrily, the sound of laughter came from the water-front where barefoot spongers and fishermen were busy with their boats and gear. Robust negresses with deep bosoms and rolling hips balanced baskets and trays upon their heads and stood gossiping with one another or exchanging shouts with their men across the water. There was noise here, but the town as a whole was somnolent, peaceful. It sprawled beside the sea like a lazy man lost in day dreams and lulled by the lapping surf and the hum of insects.

Up from the beach came O'Reilly and his youthful *alter ego*, Jacket. They were clad in clean white clothes; a month of rest had done them good. Jacket was no longer wizened; he was plump and sleek and as full of mischief as a colt, while O'Reilly's leanness had disappeared and he filled his garments as a man should. They had spent the day fishing on the reefs and now bore home the choicest part of their catch.

They turned in through a picket gate and up a walk flanked by flower-beds and outlined between rows of inverted glass bottles set side by side, the Bahama idea of neatness and beauty. At the end of the walk stood a cottage with wide porches hidden beneath jasmine and honeysuckle and morning-glory vines.

O'Reilly's eyes were shining with anticipation; he yodeled loudly. But there was no need for him to advertise his return, for at the first click of the gate-latch a figure had started from the fragrant bower and now came flying to meet him.

"Look, Rosa!" Jacket lifted the heavy string of fish. "We had stupendous luck." But Rosa was in her husband's arms and neither she nor O'Reilly had eyes for anything but each other.

"You were gone for ages," pouted the bride.

"You missed me, eh?"

"See! I caught the biggest ones, as usual," Jacket boasted. "I'm a skilful fisherman and I talk to my hook, but O'Reilly sits dreaming about somebody while the little crabs eat all his bait." When this evoked no notice the boy shrugged in disgust and went on around the house, muttering: "*Caramba!* You'd think they'd get sick of so much billing and cooing. But no! I have to steal him away and take him swimming or fishing if I want a word alone with him. And the others are just as bad—another pair of pigeons. It's like living in a dove-cote."

Rosa, too, had vastly changed. She was clad in a charming little muslin dress, there were dimples in her cheeks, she wore a heavy Maréchal Neil bud at her breast. O'Reilly held her off and devoured her with his eyes.

"Sweetheart, you grow fresher and more beautiful every hour," said he.

Rosa danced upon her toes, and tugged at him. "But come quickly and see the surprise we have. I've been

wild for your return, so hurry." She led him swiftly up the steps, and there, standing beside a chair, was Estéban Varona. "He dressed himself and walked out here alone. *He's well!*"

"Estéban! Really—"

The brother nodded decisively. "It's true. I rebelled at last. To-morrow I'll walk to the gate and the next day we'll go fishing."

"Jove! How splendid!"

"Why, I'm as firm on my feet as a rock."

Norine emerged through one of the French windows and explained: "He took advantage of me while I was gone for the mail, and now he's quite out of control. Here's a letter from Leslie, by the way. He's home and has a position and hopes we'll follow soon. There's one bit of news; he says the talk of intervention increases and he may have to return to Cuba as a war correspondent. Fancy! He's deathly frightened at the prospect."

"Intervention! That would be fine," Estéban cried.

O'Reilly nodded. "Oh, it's bound to come, and when Uncle Sam takes hold Cuba will be free."

Norine agreed: "I'm sure of it. And then — we'll all go back to our rainbow's end and dig for that pot of gold."

Estéban turned adoring eyes upon the speaker; he took her hand in his. "I've found my rainbow's end," said he.

"And I've found mine," O'Reilly asserted. "I've gained your father's treasure, and more—I've found the prize of all the Indies." With his arm about Rosa he drew her into the house.

Estéban lowered himself into his chair and Norine rested herself upon its arm. He lay back with eyes closed. From the regions at the rear came the voice of Jacket. The boy was in a declamatory mood. He had

gathered an audience, as was his daily custom, and was addressing them in English:

"I skilled more'n a dozen Spaniards at Pino Bravo. It was my day. By rights I should have been made a general, but—"

THE END